

Rev. Alexander S. W. Mahony,
A
C O L L E C T I O N
O F
D I S C O U R S E S
ON THE VARIOUS DUTIES OF RELIGION,
AS TAUGHT BY THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH;
COMPRIZING
ALL THE SUNDAYS AND FESTIVALS OF THE YEAR.

BY THE REV. MR. APPLETON, C. A. D.

Blessed are they, that hear the Word of God, and keep it.
LUKE ii. 28.

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P R E F A C E.

THE desire of happiness is so inherent to our nature, that the acquisition of what may lead to it is the drift of all our pursuits. But the misfortune is, that our notions on this general research are too frequently inconsistent with the attainment of our wishes. Forgetful of our condition, we act as if we thought the temporary life, we enjoy on earth, was the term of our existence. As Christians, however, such a conduct is a disgrace to our understanding. That ever sacred religion, whose doctrine is unerring, assures us, that the present life is but a state of pilgrimage and warfare; a state of banishment and exile from those regions of immortality, to which the hand of time is continually drawing us nearer; in fine, a state of trial and preparation for the future enjoyment of our Sovereign good, in whom alone the fulness of our bliss is to be looked for.

But, although complete felicity be not the portion of our present state; nevertheless, such a degree of it is attainable here below, as may suffice to bear us up under the pressure of all our

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difficulties.

difficulties. *Come to me ye, that are burdened, and I will refresh you.* Here is the Preceptor, whose documents we must listen to, if we wish to acquire that contentment of mind, which constitutes true happiness.

Wherefore, such being the effect of religion, to promote both our temporal and eternal welfare, whatever may contribute to extend its friendly influence, must at all times give pleasure to the thoughtful and sedate. But, at a period, when the torrent of vice is swelled to such a height, as to threaten ruin to all discipline, no attempt to stop its progress can be indifferent to the pious Christian. In this respect, we already abound with books, that might be sufficient for our direction, were we attentive to their lessons only. But whether their powers of impression are weakened by a long acquaintance, or the methodical form of Sermons be more adapted to the present taste, it is certain something new has long been wished for in this particular; and this, by desire, has fallen to my lot to venture at in the following undertaking. Conscious of my incapacity to execute it properly, I would gladly have declined the task, had there been a prospect, at the time, that any other person would have offered himself to it. But of this there was no appearance, till my plan was fully completed; when I learned, for the first time, that a superior pen was engaged in the prosecution of a similar scheme. It was too late to recede however.

As

As to the work here submitted to the tribunal of the Public; not to impose upon my readers, nor pretend to mislead their judgment, it is but equitable to inform them that few of the Sermons, these sheets present them with, have a claim to originality. Some of them indeed are entirely my own production: but the greatest part of them are little more than so many liberal translations. The different subjects of religion have been so amply discussed, that what has been already said upon them must of necessity form the basis of every undertaking of this nature. For which reason, on embarking in it, I made it my study to find out such authors, as explained the christian doctrine in the most familiar and easy method. Providence threw one in my way, whose sentiments on these matters being congenial with my own, I gladly accepted the assistance, he so graciously held out. Hyacinthe de Montargon, a religious of the order of St. Augustine, and Preacher in ordinary to Lewis the fourteenth of France, as well as to Stanislaus King of Poland, is the person, I am so much indebted to. The French nation has long been noted for the eloquence of its pulpit. But there are few of its writers, that reflect a greater credit on it, in regard to sacred oratory, than the author I am speaking of. Let his invaluable work, called the *Dictionnaire Apostolique*, be the voucher for what I assert to all, who are acquainted with it.

If the title-page of this volume does not bespeak it a translation, I hope my reasons for refusing

using to term it so, will be deemed admissible and just. For, not to repeat that several of these discourses are original and genuine; the rest of them are by no means such exact and literal copies, as the word translation seems to imply. In many of them, it is true, I have borrowed both the substance and the disposition from the writer abovementioned: but I have in none of them adhered so closely to his rules, as not to add and curtail, to insert and omit, as I thought circumstances required. My aim was to convey instruction and edification into the minds of all, especially of the lower orders, who compose the major part: in doing which, I have endeavoured to observe a medium, and to express myself in a style, that might be intelligible to every one. If I have not succeeded, I hope the candid public will excuse the attempt, and do me the justice to ascribe the failure to any other cause than the want of inclination.

The reader will remark throughout this publication a strict adherence to form and method. A division of each discourse into different parts; an introduction to each division, previous to the subject matter; and a conclusion, to wind up the whole, is the plan I have pursued invariably. Perhaps to others this may appear precise: to myself it seemed nothing more than proper, in order to impress the truths inculcated with a greater force, by rendering them distinct and clear. As to the short address to heaven, which I have universally adopted, the omission of it by
them

them that object to it, will make no difference, from the manner it is introduced in to the body of the discourses.

The text of the several Sermons are taken regularly from the gospels of such days, as they are assigned to. But both the ceremonies and obligations of the time of Lent being peculiar to that season, I have judged advisable to select such subjects for the six Sundays it comprises, as might be more particularly adapted to the duties enjoined by it. For which purpose, I have been necessitated to abandon my usual practice, and to cull out such sentences of the Scripture, by way of texts, as I naturally found applicable to the matters I meant to treat of. In consequence of which, the discourses for Lent being a deviation from the plan, I have followed in the management of the other Sundays, in arranging this collection, I have removed them from the place, they should obviously have appeared in, to join them with those on the festivals, whose texts are equally irregular.

The spirit of levity and dissipation, that characterizes the times, has nearly, it must be owned, laughed every thing serious out of doors. It cannot be expected therefore, that publications of a grave complexion should meet with much encouragement; more especially when they have little else to recommend them to public notice but the virtue they are meant to inculcate. Degenerate as the world may be however, let us think better of it still, than hastily to suppose the contagion

tagion to be universal. There are certainly at present, and, no doubt, ever will be, many well-disposed and pious persons, whose chief desire in life is to know and to accomplish the will of their heavenly Master. To such, of every description, I devote the following sheets; content, if these humble essays can but contribute to their welfare, and direct my fellow-creatures into the road to solid happiness. And as to the defects of this performance (which unquestionably are many) I hope the sincerity of a good-will may be sufficient to plead my cause with the indulgent and considerate reader.

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T H E



T H E

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On the last and general Judgment.

Then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and Majesty. Luke xxi. 27.

THE Son of Man will come then, Christians; we shall behold him, robed in all the pomp and splendour of his glory, and sitting on the throne of his justice. The sun eclipsed, the stars loosened from the firmament, the earth convulsed, the elements in confusion, the gaping tombs yielding up their trusts; such are the signs that announce his speedy arrival. But wherefore does he come again? To decide our eternal destiny, to reward the just, and to condemn the reprobate. O alarming catastrophe! What pen shall picture thy terrors? Shall we, my brethren, be more insensible than the very heathens, so many of whom have been converted, and even made martyrs to Christianity, by the bare recital of this dreadful event? How much is it to be wished we would often place before our eyes this awful scene? What advantages might we not derive from it? For this purpose our prudent and tender Mother, the Church, on this Sunday, the first of the Ecclesiastical year, exhibits this tremendous object to our view. Ignorant as we are whether we be worthy of love or hatred, and in utter darkness in regard to futurity, what can we do better than think, and think *seriously* of that last day? Our eternity is here at stake; there is no medium; we must win or lose every thing.

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Tremble,

Tremble, ye Sinners! at this formidable idea ; all your sins shall be examined ; all your crimes shall be punished. The light of God's truth shall convict you ; the severity of his justice shall condemn you. Such, my dear friends, is the plan of this instruction ; these the two points, that I will endeavour to explain to you, after the usual application to the throne of grace.

Although each of the attributes of the Divinity be infinite, we may nevertheless assert, that none of them is more extensive than his knowledge, and this he exerts particularly over our hearts : it is the perfection of his nature to penetrate into their inmost windings and recesses. Wherefore, at the day of judgment he will bring to light, first, the reality of our crimes ; and, secondly, the falsity of our pretended virtues.

The Sovereign Judge, I say, first, dear people, will have a perfect knowledge of the sinner's crimes, and will expose them in all their deformity. In this world, the examination of a criminal is but imperfect, the detail of his offences superficial, and the proportion between the fault and its punishment unequal. Besides, human justice does not extend to every vice ; it is not competent to search into our thoughts and desires : but the justice in question is an universal justice : a justice, to which every thing is amenable, and which shall take cognizance of the most trifling words, of the most secret thoughts, of the most imperceptible motions of the heart : it is a justice, in fine, that will examine, weigh, and balance every thing.

The sinner then, dear Christians, at the last day, shall be known for what he is, and what he has been ; not one of his actions shall escape notice. At the tribunal of Christ, says the Apostle, we must all be made manifest. Surrounded by the divine light, the culprit shall appear to the eyes of his judge, and be exposed to the view of the universe in his genuine colours. To draw near therefore in spirit to the foot of this dreadful tribunal, who amongst us shall be able to bear the brightness of this all-penetrative light ? Alas ! was nothing to be produced to view, but what the sun had already witnessed, would not this suffice to overwhelm us ? What crying injustices, what oaths, what drunkenness, what immodesties, what scandals ? At present, brethren, these horrors do not affect you : habituated to vice, as you are, you look it boldly in the face : but what will be your sentiments, when these shameful excesses shall be exposed before your eyes, in all their foulness and deformity ?

And not only will your most secret actions, Christians, be here held up to light ; but their whole process likewise, and all their springs. Did we but see the pitiful meanness, the wretched baseness, that usually enters into the composition of each passion, there is no sinner, says St. Augustine, that would not rather choose to conceal himself in the most profound obscurity, than endure such a manifestation for a moment : all this, notwithstanding, the Almighty will display in the face of heaven and earth. We shall then behold by what fraudulent and secret means you succeeded in blasting your neighbour's character, and entailed contempt upon his name. We shall no longer
be

be in doubt what it was attracted you to such a suspicious house. We shall be witnesses to those brutal and hidden doings, at which you blushed in the very act. Jesus Christ had told you that the mystery of iniquity should be revealed, even to its most latent circumstances, and you would not believe him. Open your eyes, ye offenders ! at least now, and behold with astonishment those of the universe fixed on you. There, will it be said, is the public-house, where, after having sacrificed your reason, you committed such enormities, so many scandals ; there the female whose credulity you abused, whose innocence you corrupted ; look at those walls, so often the witnesses of your infamous obscenities ; these at present shall unmask you, and expose you to all mankind.

Next shall come the weighty article of your abuse of such things, as were given you for your sanctification : how often you assisted at the great sacrifice of the Mass without respect, without attention : how often you despised the sacred inspirations of your God : how often, instead of applying yourselves to your advancement in the science of the Saints, you preferred spending your time in diversions and amusements.

Then, says the Apocalypse, the books shall be opened, and the dead judged by the things, that are written in them. But what, my brethren, are these books ? Simple reason for the heathen ; the Law for the Jew ; the Gospel for the Christian. Read, ye Heathens, read this book of reason : you will there see that, in defiance of its light, you have been ignorant of the God, who spoke to you by each of his creatures : you have adored stocks and stones in his stead ; and, by your obstinacy, have rendered yourselves unworthy of any further favour, that might have fitted you for heaven : deserving however of pity, in consideration of the scanty aids which you received, you shall have but few accusers, besides your own consciences : God alone can condemn you.

Many more reproaches shall the Jews experience, from the testimonies of their law, of the alliance of God with them, of his ark, his temple, his altars, his prodigies, victories, revelations and a continued chain of prophets, sent to instruct and apprize them of the coming of their Messiah. Deaf to all these admonitions, by what a crowd of accusers must not they expect to be impeached ?

But you, my dear people, in quality of Christians, what can you say at the sight of the Gospel, authorized by the voice, the example, the miracles, the blood, the death of a God made man ? With so many helps, superior to any ever offered to the rest of mankind, what heartfelt reproaches may you not expect, if unhappily you shall have rendered these means useless to your salvation ? For if, according to the threat of Jesus Christ, the inhabitants of Nineve and the Queen of Sheba shall rise in judgment against the Israelites ; how much more loudly will they censure us ; who, while we made profession of his faith, and received his Gospel, shall yet have made no advantage of it, beyond the Jews or Heathens ; on the contrary, shall have scandalously belied it by our thoughts, by our words, and

by our actions ? O touchstone of our fidelity, sacred Gospel ! who shall stand thy test ?

Again, Christians ; were the transactions of this day to be in secret, the confusion of the Sinner might be less insupportable. But, no : all nature, in concert, shall rise up against him. What an aggravation to his misery ! If, during life, we are so sensible to the least reflection cast upon us, how shall we bear to have the whole shame and infamy of our conduct exposed to the public eye ?

But what will add still more to the reprobate's astonishment, is that he shall then find himself oppressed by the weight of the sins of others. Recollect here, my friends, all that has been said, all that has been done through your example, your counsels ; and you will not fail to feel the pressure of a thousand faults, that you have been the occasion of in others. O divine justice ! how unhappy the fate of the sinner ? who, at the very time he almost thinks himself acquitted, is found guilty of the blackest crimes ; not because he committed them in person, but because he perpetrated them by means of others.

Neither is this all, dear Christians ; the crimes of the wicked being thus revealed, the Sovereign Judge shall unmask those pretended virtues, formerly so much honoured and respected ; but which now shall be of no value. The time for imposition is elapsed. In this world, a fair outside often hides the most foul intentions : vice is frequently disguised under the garb of virtue : The whole hope of the sinner at present is that he shall not be discovered, but shall dupe the world by his hypocrisy. How many detractors, and even calumniators, carry their assurance so far, as to boast their charity ? how many libertines, addicted to the most shameful vices, find the secret to impose upon their pastor, and raise in their fellow-citizens an opinion of their regularity ? On the contrary, how many of the most exemplary probity are treated ignominiously ? how many good intentions are misinterpreted ? how many virtuous actions censured ? Now it is principally to obviate these difficulties that there shall be a general judgment, in which each one shall be known for what he is, and has been. There the proud man shall be trampled on ; the voluptuary arraigned ; the detractor exposed ; the hypocrite unmasked : the time for concealing a foul inside under a modest exterior, for giving the name of devotion to what is either irreligion, or superstition at best, is no more : what was thought buried in eternal oblivion shall now be brought to view again : God will hold up those sins, we had been so industrious to conceal from the eyes of the world, and which shame had prevented us from revealing to a confessor ; he will expose to the view of our acquaintance, of our friends, and of our enemies, the injustice we endeavoured to cloak with the name of service, the inveterate hatred we disguised under the appearance of friendship ; and what more shall I add ? Whatever we shall have laboured to hide from ourselves, or to palliate with the gloss of virtue, shall be known for what it is ; that is to say, for vice.

Conceive here, if you can, brethren, the consternation, the fury, the despair of the enraged sinner. With what frightful howlings shall

shall he entreat the mountains to interpose between his God and him? with what piercing cries shall he implore the aid of death itself; but in vain: *relentless death shall fly from him*, Apoc. ix. 6. All his wishes are useless, all his efforts unavailable; *the desire of the wicked shall perish*; Ps. cxi. 10. as I will now evince to you in the following part.

Tremble, ye reprobate! The time is come, in which the fatal sentence of your condemnation must be pronounced: a sentence conformable to that holiness of your God, which will no longer endure sin: a sentence founded on that severity, which will not relent: a sentence, which must be executed in defiance of every obstacle. For the justice of the Lord is holy, it is rigorous, it is inexorable.

It is *holy*, I say, and it is its sanctity that directs all its decisions; it is its sanctity that strikes the sinner with dread, with horror, with despair. For if one man trembles in the presence of another; if he is sometimes so abashed, as to change colour, and lose his voice before an earthly judge; with what awe, what terror shall we be seized, when cited to the bar of the Holy of Holies. He will not be then a *hidden God*, as Isaias calls him; but a God, that will appear *manifestly*; a God, that will shew himself in all the splendour of his sanctity; in the lustre of all his infinite perfections; *and who shall stand to see him?* Malac. iii. 2.

Depart from me, said St. Peter to our Saviour, *for I am a sinful man*, Luke v. 8. With how much more reason shall we say to him, when environed with his glory? Truth! wisdom! justice! sanctity! depart from me. But no: thou art going to crush me with the whole pressure of thy power. The insults, I have offered to the blood of Christ, that redeemed me; to thy divine grace, which sanctified me; to the Church, that adopted me; to religion, I made profession of; all these insults cry for vengeance and to my eternal cost, I am about to experience that thou art an holy God, who judgest the wicked according to thy sanctity; a severe God, who chastisest them according to thy rigour.

Yes, ye sinners! every thing shall be punished. Alas! my dear friends, what will then become of us; and among the rest, what will become of myself; when the Sovereign Judge shall arm his wrath against the crimes of my whole life? Every thing shall be punished. What! my God! are there no further hopes then from thy mercy? No, says the Lord, there is no mercy for you; you have exhausted it; how frequently has it called you? how long has it awaited you? It had a term, and that fatal term is now arrived; you are at present in the hands of my justice, out of which there is no deliverance. Every thing shall be punished; for as the malice of man's heart is unfathomable, so are the treasures of my justice inexhaustible.

Figure not to yourselves then, ye offenders! a mild and benevolent God, whose patience you have so often wearied, by abusing his bounty: forget those tender names of Father, and Shepherd, which he permitted you to use on earth, in order to testify his affection to you; he is no longer that innocent Lamb, that *taketh away the sins of the world*;

world ; he is now, according to the sacred phrase, a roaring lion, a furious leopard, an enraged bear that has lost her whelps. Strong expressions ; but which, after all, paint in feeble colours only the excessive indignation of this God of vengeance.

Neither shall the culprit have the consolation even of complaining of the severity of his sentence : he himself shall be compelled to own its equity. It is true, will the Lord say, that this sinner, at present bent under the oppressive weight of my justice, was my work, my image, and my son. But O ! my people ! my angels ! my elect ! nay, ye, my very enemies ! *judge between me and my vineyard*, Is. v. 3. If I now treat him with such severity, it is because he has long abused my patience ; a thousand times have I opened to him the treasury of my mercy, and a thousand times has he despised it ; as an injured benefactor, as an insulted God, do I owe nothing to my justice ? *judge between me and my vineyard*. The cries of his conscience, the voice of the ministers of his salvation, disgrace even, and all other means possible were used to turn his heart, and bring him back to me ; but he slighted every effort ; *judge then*. I have spared nothing ; inspirations, threats, promises, my light, my grace, my calls, all have been employed ; he disdained my favours, he proved refractory at my chastisements, he turned every thing to poison ; *judge then*. Let him to-day therefore, be sensible, although it can but aggravate his misfortune ; let him be sensible of the enormity of his sins, of the indignity of his insults, of the ingratitude of his conduct ; and you, my coheirs ! who are going to partake of my glory, *judge both of the crime and of the criminal* ; for such is the foundation of my extreme rigour ; such the causes, that are about to render my severity inflexible.

And this, dear Christians, is the last property of the divine justice : nothing shall have the power to work upon it : neither prayers nor tears shall be able to move it. In this life mercy and justice go hand in hand ; *when thou art angry*, says the Prophet, Habac. iii. 2. *thou wilt remember mercy* : in the height of thy fury thou wilt be mindful, O Lord ! and make it appear that thou art a God of mercies ; since thy very anger is frequently one of the greatest blessings in the sinner's regard. Such is the use he makes of his severity here below. But at that final judgment, at the close of time, He will exert his justice without any mixture ; and this *judgment without mercy* shall be the foundation of his glory. But what, dear people, shall inflame his indignation, to the highest pitch, will be our abuse of his graces. This inexorable judge will recollect that he was formerly a father, full of bounty and affection ; this king, so tremendous in his majesty, will remember that he was once our brother, our friend, our protector, our advocate : He will recall to his memory whatever he did and suffered for us ; he will look at his cross ; he will point at his wounds ; he will produce every mark of his patience and charity : but with no other view than to arm himself with fury and revenge. He will tell the reprobate that as his love was beyond all bounds, so must his wrath likewise

wife be beyond all measure. He will bare his arm ; not one of the guilty shall escape him ; his blow shall be inevitable.

Here, my brethren, apprehension seizes me ; my thoughts are confounded. I behold this God of vengeance, with fury in his eyes, turning to the criminals, and discharging the whole weight of his indignation on them : *I will pour out my wrath upon you, I will accomplish my anger*, Ezech. vii. 8. I hear him thundering out against them the sentence of death, of death eternal, without appeal.

Then shall he say to them, that shall be on his left hand : Ah ! what shalt thou say to them, O God of terrors ! with that voice, which cleaves the cedars, and stems the violence of the impetuous torrents ? What shalt thou say to them ? *Depart from me* ; expect nothing more from my goodness, *ye cursed* with every malediction ! But where, O Lord ! retire to ? Go, and burn in the fire, which my justice has prepared ; and know, ungrateful wretches ! that I condemn you to it for ever ; go into everlasting fire, Matt. xxv. 41. *Depart from me* ; my glory was not made for such monsters as you are ; go and burn for all eternity, in those ardent flames, which my wrath had kindled for the devil only and his angels : you would imitate them in their excesses ; you have made choice of them for your masters and for your models ; be then the companions of their sufferings, as you have been the accomplices of their works ; burn together with them in a fire, that shall never be extinguished, until I cease to be God. O dreadful judgment ! O hell ! O eternity ! O tremendous eternity ! who shall not tremble ? who shall not shudder ? who shall not wither away for fear ?

To secure yourselves, my dear friends, against this alarming and fatal moment, this direful and decisive sentence ; after the example of the holy King Ezechias, *recollect in the bitterness of your souls all the years*, all the days of your past life. Oppose examen to examen, judgment to judgment, that you may have no cause for apprehension on that day of revelation. Like David, be at present penetrated with a pious horror of God's judgments. And here, O Lord ! let me conjure thee for the flock and for the pastor : terrified at the view of thy judgments, we do not ask of thee a superficial fear, a transitory, an inefficacious fear ; but we beseech thee, and that most fervently, to impress us with a perfect fear ; which, whilst it enlightens our minds, may operate on our hearts, and fill them with dread at the sight of thy terrors ; a fear, that may engage us to prevent thy justice ; that may induce us to omit nothing, which may contribute to appease thy anger ; a fear, that may make us solicitous without dejection, that may inform us without despondency, that may correct us without despair. Give us, O Divine Saviour ! this wholesome fear, and pierce our inmost feelings with it. I implore it for myself ; I implore it for these souls, intrusted to my care ; fully satisfied that if we only fear during life, we shall have no reason to fear at *the day of wrath* ; as I sincerely entreat him to grant we none of us may. Amen.

T H E

T H E

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

O N S C A N D A L.

Blessed is he, who shall not be scandalized in me. Matt. xi. 6.

THESE words of our Divine Redeemer are explained by the interpreters of the sacred text in two different senses. Some say he meant by them secretly to reprimand the envy of St. John's disciples. He discovers to them, says St. Chrysostom, their hidden faults, and that in a manner so discreet as to leave their own conscience alone privy to their weakness.

Others think that the Son of God insinuates the scandal by them, which both Jews and Gentiles would afterwards take at his sufferings and death. For it appeared, St. Gregory says, a folly to the eyes of men, that the author of life should die for mankind: and thus, the most deserving incentive of their gratitude was unhappily perverted to a source of scandal. I am willing to believe, brethren, that Jesus Christ is not in our days an object of scandal, as he was heretofore. But a scandal of another kind, of which you yourselves are the authors, has succeeded to that, which was formerly taken at our Saviour. You are no longer perhaps scandalized *in Christ*. But do you not scandalize him in his members, when by the bad example, which you give, you instill the poison of vice into the minds of those with whom you converse? It is this enormous sin I speak of in the present discourse, in order to caution you, my brethren, against its fatal consequences: since, as he himself tells us, the author of scandal has every thing to dread; *wo to that man, by whom scandal cometh*, Matt.

xyiii. 7. Let me therefore solicit your attention to this important subject ; to treat which in a more intelligible form I say, first, that the scandalizing sinner acts in concert with the devil ; as far as in him lies, for the ruin of his neighbour ; secondly, that he frustrates the views of Christ in the redemption of mankind ; and lastly, that he lays himself open to the most alarming dangers. That I may set these truths in such a light, as to preserve you from giving any scandal for the future, or induce you to make amends for whatever fault you may have hitherto been guilty of in this line, must be the gift of heaven ; the aid of which we will first implore in a short, but fervent, address.

As the sole design of Jesus Christ, dear friends, in regard to mankind, is to save them ; so the only view of the devil is to damn them. *Christ appeared*, St. John says, *to take away our sins* : whilst all the exertions of the devil, says Tertullian, are levelled at extending the empire of vice, and increasing its influence : and what he cannot accomplish in person, he intrusts to, and executes by the scandalous sinner.

St. Paul, instructing the faithful of his time, told them that they should do good *not only in the sight of God, but also before men* : not with an eye to vain-glory ; but that the influence of this silent, yet eloquent instruction might induce others to follow their example. But although we may safely affirm that good example is highly efficacious ; we nevertheless find, by daily experience, that the power of bad example is still more persuasive ; and that the world is far more ready to copy evil, than virtuous patterns. The reason of which, though most mortifying to our pride, is obvious. Virtue is not the produce of our own soil ; the acquisition of it requires exertions : whereas vice, since the fall of our first parents, is naturalized, as I may say, to us ; it suffices to be off our guard, and to yield to our inclinations, to become its victims.

Now what the devil, with all his artifices, dear Christians, cannot effect by himself, he accomplishes by the means of his agent, the scandal-giving sinner. This, alas ! experience proves but too well. How many have we known, who spent their days in the greatest simplicity, and a happy ignorance of vice, until the emissaries of satan came to teach it to them ? How many whose angelic innocence attracted the smiles of Heaven ; till, blighted by the contagious breath of evil company, they became the objects of its horror.

Nor is this all. The scandalous man would fulfil his commission but partially, was he satisfied with making sin known. A too faithful executor of his master's plans, he labours to spread on all sides the stench of that corruption, with which he himself is infected. Divine Providence has annexed to vice a certain shame, as a bar to check its progress, and preserve mankind from its contagion. But the notorious sinner removes this bar ; he divests iniquity of the shame attending it, and, by public repetition, palliates its infamy. We are tamed, as I may say, into sin, when we see it committed without restraint ; and as St. Cyprian says, soon disposed to do the evil, we see practised so frequently. The number of criminals, whilst it countenances the offence, seems to diminish its horror. Nay, more, to transform it into a
merit

merit even : " as murder, says this Saint, which in individuals is an act of wickedness, passes for generosity and nobleness of soul, when a public action : " and things authorized by custom assume the sanction of legality.

You may also here observe, dear people, that, as the example of those of a more elevated state makes a much greater impression on the mind ; so the situation of parents and superiors is, in this respect, far more dangerous : in as much as the scandal, which their influence gives rise to, is particularly calculated to encourage sin. Those, that are under their conduct, presume they cannot do wrong in copying their models. This, says St. Cyprian, was the stratagem, made use of by the heathens to colour their vices, and in some measure deify them. The patterns, they held up, were those of an adulterous Jupiter, a prostituted Venus, a thieving Mercury. Experience, Christians, affords but too many proofs of the pernicious effects of this artifice. There are sins so degrading to human nature, that the sight of them would be insupportable, did not custom extenuate their infamy. For instance, could a person, who had never seen a man in a state of intoxication, behold one in this condition without horror ? and yet, has not a general practice given a sanction to this vice, and almost stamp'd a credit on it ? It is easy therefore to perceive that bad example encourages sin, and spreads it universally.

But the scandalous libertine goes still further. By a species of malignity, more replete with danger than any I have yet mentioned, he scatters destruction among all that are so unfortunate as to be the witnesses of his scandal. It is the reasoning of St. Chrysostom : according to the Gospel, says this Father, the characteristic of the devil is to have been a *murderer from the beginning of the world*, John viii. 44 ; and why was he always a murderer ? but because, from the commencement of time, it has been his occupation to ruin souls ; by seducing them, by tempting them, by laying snares for them, by obstructing their conversion. Now in what is the life of the professed libertine employed ? In deluding souls and damning them : I mean in taking advantage of their weakness, in making a handle of their simplicity, in triumphing over their modesty, in impeding their return to virtue, in confirming them in vice. Man of scandal ! is not this your most serious business ? The devil, from the beginning, was a murderer himself ; now he makes use of you ; you are his instrument, his tool, by sacrificing those unhappy victims to your lusts and passions. Let us see at present how the scandalizing sinner, besides executing the plans of Satan, subverts in effect the designs of Jesus Christ.

The Son of God, says St. Luke, came only to *seek and save that, which was lost*, chap. xix. 10. This was the motive of his incarnation, when he vouchsafed to assume our flesh : this was the end of his labours, of his sufferings, of his passion and of his death ; *who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven*, Cred. Nic. But what is the effect of the sinners scandal ? To prevent the blood of Christ, which was shed for the salvation of souls, from producing its desired fruit.

And

And in fact, my brethern, it is but too evident that he who gives scandal, opposes voluntarily the redemption brought to us by our Saviour. Whence St. Bernard styles all such the persecutors of Jesus Christ: "no, he says, cruel as the Jews were and destitute of humanity, there were not so barbarous as the scandal-giving sinner; nor is their crime so enormous." In attacking the life of this heaven-sent deliverer, they contributed, although unknowingly, to the tender desires of his charity: in opening his sacred veins, they spilt his blood for themselves and for the salvation of mankind. But oh the horrible attempt! exclaims Tertullian, the savage cruelty of the public sinner! who enlightened, and, of consequence, far more guilty than the ignorant and uninstructed Jew, assassinated the Messiah in his own breast and in those of others; renews the mournful scene of his bitter passion; and to complete his malice, destroys as far as his power reaches, the whole fruit and merit of his death.

It is this atrocious crime, this premeditated deicide the Apostle had in view, in that pathetic remonstrance, which he made to the Corinthians; *through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?* 1 Cor. viii. 11. If your brother has had the misfortune to have incurred your hatred, revenge yourself on his property, on his person; murder not his soul. But what do I say? Is not the endearing name he bears, which binds him to you by the most sacred ties of faith, sufficient to mollify your savage breast? With what assurance can you dare to aim a mortal blow at that brother, for whom his and your Saviour Jesus Christ was pleased to die? Is it then in vain that the Deity became incarnate, and was made a victim for his salvation? What! by an unparalleled excess of cruelty, in insulting the redemption of your God, do you pretend to rob him of a conquest, that cost him no less than his blood and life? *through thy knowledge shall a brother perish, for whom Christ died?*

And is there no end then to your barbarity, notorious sinner? If my neighbour falls, you say, let him impute it to his own weakness. Perfidious wretch! It is because he was weak you should have spared him. But is not scandal also highly dangerous to the strong and generous? No, doubtless; thou knowest, O Lord! that those happy souls, whom frequent trials have rooted in the love of thy holy discipline, have nothing to fear from licentious communication; nor is it there you direct your efforts, ye known offenders. It is at giddy and unexperienced youth; it is at the more frail sex you level your empoisoned arrows. As weak therefore, as you please; his weakness, so far from extenuating must aggravate your guilt. He is weak, as you acknowledge: yet instead of reaching out a friendly hand to preserve him from the precipice, you ensnare him by your scandalous conduct, and plunge him headlong down the abyss. He is weak; and to support his weakness, a God vouchsafed to die for him; whilst you seek only to inflame his passions, and to draw him into occasions, where his tottering virtue must soon be overset. Ah! monster as you are, would it not have been better both for him and you, as it is written of the traitorous Judas, that you never had been born?

And

And in fact, what has not the scandalizing sinner to apprehend ? For, to view the progress of scandal, is it not enough to make us think ourselves at the eve of those rueful days, in which, according to the prediction of our Redeemer, an infinity of false prophets shall arise, eager to seduce, if possible, the very elect. *Wo then to the man by whom scandal cometh.* *Wo* to you, debauched libertine, who make it your sport to sacrifice unguarded innocence at the shrine of brutal passion. *Wo* to you, drunkard, whose example draws so many into the like excesses. *Wo* to you, in fine, who assume the name of Christians, only to dishonour it by heathen morals. At your hands will the Deity require, says St. Basil, the blood of his Son. You have robbed him of his subjects : you have precipitated those souls into hell, that he designed for heaven. What can you answer to a God, jealous of his rights ? or will it be any consolation to you under your torments to have increased the number of your associates in misery ? *Wo to the man, by whom scandal cometh.*

At the sight of the multifarious depravity, that surrounds us, have we not more reason to address our complaints to God, than even St. Bernard had ? O Lord ! said that holy man, at the foot of his crucifix, the whole body of Christians seems to have conspired against thee. From the lowest to the highest, all are tainted, and infect one another. Iniquity bursts forth on all sides, and finds nothing to oppose it. It takes its rise from the bad example of the most ancient and respectable. It takes its rise from the weakness and unjustifiable indulgence of those, whose rank, authority or years place them on a superior line. It takes its rise, and this is still more deplorable, from the persons, whose state of life engages them to edify ; to act, to speak, to propagate thy service, and to exhibit in themselves thy charity and zeal. Yes, my Saviour ! they, who fill the offices of distinction in thy church, are too often the first to persecute thee, by the irregularity of their conduct. And here, my dear friends, I cannot but be confounded for you, and for myself, unworthy pastor as I am. Let us in concert bewail the scandal, I have perhaps been so unfortunate as to give you, and from the resolution to edify each other for the future ; in order to avoid the punishments, reserved for this guilt.

For that the Almighty treasures up his most formidable vengeance for the scandal-giving sinner, we need no other proof than that exhibited in the person of King David. This Prince, in other respects a man according to God's own heart, forgetful of what he owed to his Maker and himself, becomes guilty of adultery and murder. The veil being removed from before his eyes, he confesses his iniquities in the bitterness of his soul ; *I have sinned against the Lord*, 2 Kings xii. 13. God declares to him by his Prophet, that he forgives him : but because, subjoins Nathan, thou hast scandalized thy people, and *hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child*, the unhappy fruit of thy crime, whom thou lovest so tenderly, *shall surely die*. Descending from his throne, David clothes himself with sackcloth : but in vain : God remains inflexible, and David's prayer is rejected. If we see no instances of a like severity in our days ; far from being imboldened by it,

it, let us tremble ; for know, Brethren, as it much imports you should, that although the arm of Heaven be not displayed so visibly, it is not less terrible.

And indeed, what more tremendous punishment can there be, than that, with which the sacred writings threaten us, by this same David ? Thou hast laid snares for thy brother ; thou hast scandalized the weak ; *these things hast thou done, and I was silent.* Ps. xlix. 21. God is silent, it is true ; but the souls, that you have ruined, are not so. The victims of your scandal, they demand vengeance. Revenge us, O Lord ! if I am damned, who passed my days in innocence, and in the observance of thy holy precepts, it was that libertine, who seduced me : it was that drunkard, who confirmed me in this vicious habit : it was that swearer, who taught me to blaspheme thy sacred name. Which of us deserves the more rigorous punishment ? We, whose sole desire was to serve thee with fidelity ; or those monsters, who left no stone unturned to effect our ruin ? But thy judgments, O God ! are equitable. If these reflections, Christians, do not strike you, I am ignorant, I confess, what will.

From all that has been said ; what, scandalous sinners ! shall we conclude ? But that, whilst you have life, you are still entitled to the divine mercy ; and that a duty, most essentially incumbent on you, is to atone for the scandal you have given. But how is this to be done, you will say. I will tell you, and at the same time entreat you never to forget it. If you have contributed to the loss of any souls, either by bad example, by irreligious or loose discourse, by a culpable neglect, or by any other means, do your utmost for the future to win over as many to the path of virtue, as you have separated from it : and this, dear people, by the education of your children, by an attention to your servants, by a diligence in procuring instructions for them, by an universally good example, and by the sweet odour of a holy life and conversation : Otherwise, the Lord will say to you as he did to Cain, that the *voice of your brother's blood*, whom you have murdered in a more inhuman manner than even Cain did Abel, *crieth to him.* With hearts then pierced with regret, and in the most lively sentiments of compunction, address yourselves to the Saviour of mankind ; to that God, whom all, that invoke him, will find to be a *God of mercies*, to repair, by his grace, the losses, you have occasioned to him by your scandal ; to heal those, whom you have wounded ; to raise up those, whom you have thrown down ; to bring back those, whom you have drawn astray : This, my brethren, is the surest method to evade the punishments, that await scandal and the scandalizing sinner.

If therefore, my dear friends, you would at present seriously consult your interest, and ward off the avenging arm, that threatens you, give no more scandal. Let such be your determination in the presence of this altar, which contains all the treasures of celestial mercy : And not only resolve to avoid being the authors of any scandal for the time to come ; but firmly purpose also to make amends, as soon as possible, for whatever degree of it you may have hitherto unfortunately occasioned : that each of you, my brethren, accompanied with many others, attracted by his pious example and charitable care, may everlastingly rejoice in the recompense of his virtues ; as I truly wish you all may. Amen.

T H E

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON HUMILITY.

And he confessed, I am not Christ. John i. 26.

THE Gospel of this day, my friends, holds up to us a model of humility, in the person of St. John the Baptist ; who although dignified by the Jews with the qualities of the Messiah, rejects their proffered honour without hesitation or restriction : *I am not Christ.* But he is Christ's Ambassador and precursor ; sanctified in his mother's womb. These distinctions however do not dazzle him. Humility had taken too deep root in his heart to be any ways influenced by the titles offered to him. Let us here ponder the terms, which the Evangelist makes use of. *And he confessed and did not deny ;* i. e. according to the explication of interpreters, he declared plainly, firmly and constantly that he was not the Christ. *I am not,* he says ; and if I am any thing, I am but the echo of one crying in the desert. He might have said he was Elias, in whose spirit he was come, as Christ himself said of him ; or more than a prophet, as the same sacred oracle announced. But he seeks only to annihilate himself in the presence of both God and man. Admirable humility, which stands the test of the most trying temptation !

But to bring the matter home, dear Christians, to our own breasts : Is this our conduct ? Have we the resolution to refuse the honours that are offered to us, and restore them to those, who are more lawfully

fully entitled to them ? Or rather, when we find ourselves esteemed beyond our deserts, instead of undeceiving them, that thus distinguish us, are we not elated by their commendations ; keeping that back with one hand which our very blindness make us believe we relinquish with the other ! A false, a Pharisaical humility : True humility is not so complex : It is simple and undisguised ; and though it says but little, it explains itself clearly. Such is the lesson, I here purpose to inculcate ; to succeed in which, I design to lay before you, first, the motives that engage you to the practice of this virtue ; and secondly, to examine why humility, which is so essential to the character of a Christian, should notwithstanding be a thing so uncommon and rare among them that make profession of Christianity. O blessed model of humility, Divine Redeemer ! assist us by thy grace to comprehend this mystery of thy sacred doctrine, as we now fervently implore through thy infinite merits.

To convince you, dear people, that in the whole morality of Christ, there is nothing more solidly established than the necessity of humility, I will make three reflections by way of proof : first, on the precept of Jesus Christ ; secondly, on the knowledge of ourselves ; and thirdly, on our own interest. Yes, Christians ; the Lord himself enjoins humility, and makes an indispensable precept of it. Your reason discovers to you what you are, and calls on you for justice. Your interest demands it of you.

I say then, first, that to be humble is the express command of your God. Only open the sacred volumes, and you will confess that they contain no precept more strongly marked than this. The following reasoning will shew it evidently : When our Saviour informs us of the indispensable necessity of baptism, penance and the Eucharist, and establishes them authoritatively, hear how he expresses himself ; *Amen, I say—Except a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God : John iii. 5.* which words shew plainly the necessity of baptism. *Except you do penance, you shall perish : Luke xiii. 5.* which evince the obligation of repentance. *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you shall not have life in you : John vi. 54.* which demonstrate the necessity of participating in the holy Eucharist : a necessity however, which is not altogether so essential, as that of the two preceding sacraments. Now, from these expressions, it is obvious that humility is no less necessary than baptism, penance, or the Eucharist. For indictating to his disciples the necessity of humility, Christ makes use of the like terms ; *Amen, I say, unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven : Matt. xviii.* And for fear they should be ashamed of humbling themselves, he adds ; *Who-soever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven : ib. iv.*

For observe, my brethren ; if, in consequence of the words of Christ here cited, we acknowledge the necessity of baptism for Christians, of penance for sinners, of the Eucharist for the just, are we not equally founded in asserting the necessity of humility, not only in

an obscure state of life, as is that of many present ; but in every station and condition possible.

But what confirms this obligation is, that this precept is enforced, not only by the word, but still more by the example of our divine instructor. *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.* Matt. xi. 29. Learn it, he says, from my mouth : learn it from my actions : study my life : attend to my conduct, and you will see that I every where teach this lesson. I teach it in my mother's womb, by assuming a body : I teach it in the crib, where I am laid on straw, and swaddled in rags : I teach in the work-shop of a poor mechanic, where the greatest part of my time is spent : I teach it on the cross : I teach it in the grave : And why ? But because, as St. Augustine says, the lesson of humility is the ground-work of Christian morality and the science of salvation, it influences its whole system ; it upholds its arguments ; it verifies its conclusions.

But what must make you, my friends, yet more sensible of the necessity of this lovely virtue is what St. Bernard advances concerning it ; who says that all other virtues are included in humility. And in fact, faith is but an humility, that makes us submissively assent to whatever the church proposes : Hope, an humility, that inspires us with patience, under the expectation of the things which we look up to : Charity, an humility, that prompts us to love, for God's sake, those who otherwise are frequently no ways amiable, &c. Humility then must be of great importance, since it is the foundation of all other virtues ; or rather since all other virtues are nothing but humility. O my God ! therefore should we say, my brethren, when shall I learn this virtue, so essential to my salvation, so decisive of my future lot. Or rather, Lord ! how can I be ignorant of it, after the repeated proofs of it, which thou hast given me ? Can I still be rebellious, or indifferent to a virtue, that is so much recommended to me, and which must fix my eternal destiny ? No, divine Saviour ! I renounce all pride for ever ; and sacrifice myself wholly to thy glory.

But although the instructions and example of a God should fail to establish the necessity of being humble ; I say, the knowledge we ought to have of ourselves, dear Christians, should suffice to convince us of the obligation of becoming so. It is no great wonder that a man, who pays no attention to what he is, should recoil at the doctrine of humility. But when opening his eyes, he views himself in a true light, this virtue can no longer be offensive ; the perfect knowledge of the weakness of his nature, and of the baseness of his extraction convinces him of the necessity of humbling himself.

To enter therefore into our nothingness : I do not speak, remark, of that being, which we have all received in sin ; sin, which, having tainted us from our origin, has tarnished the lustre of primitive innocence, and from the instant of our issuing from our Creator's hands, has made us the slave of Satan. Neither do I speak of that shapeless lump of clay and dirt, the original matter of these bodies we are now so fond of. What a fund of humiliation must not here occur to each one ? It is certain we are nothing ; nor is it less so that, of our-

ourselves, we are unable to do any thing worthy of Heaven ; and that, if we take any step towards it, it is God still, who is the author and finisher of our salvation. He must begin the work ; he must carry it on ; he must complete it. If he abandons us, either we shall do nothing, or what we do will be estimated as nothing : and if, according to the doctrine of the Apostle, *We are insufficient to think any good, as of ourselves*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. how much more to perfect it, without his divine assistance ? as Christ explains himself by the mouth of St. John, *without me you can do nothing* : Unless I stretch out my hand to you, neither much nor little can you accomplish. Whence St. Paul infers that our strength, our whole *sufficiency is from God* ; and that whatever we do, we are not the authors of it, but *the grace of God within us*.

But I go a step further, brethren, and advance that, in the practice of humility, our interest is in unison with our reason, and that the use of this virtue is not less advantageous, than equitable. In fact, all the advantages we can expect to reap from virtue, in this sublunary state, are reducible to three heads : to be undisturbed within ourselves ; to live peaceably with our fellow-creatures ; to render God propitious. Three short reflections, Christians, will convince you, that these inestimable advantages are the precious fruits of humility.

To be undisturbed then within our own breasts, I say that we must be humble. Suppose a man in any imaginable situation ; whether buffeted by the perverseness of the times, or the sport of capricious fortune, if he be truly humble, nothing troubles, nothing discourages, nothing alarms him. Viewing every thing in this world in the light of trifles, he sees without concern the state of misery, to which he is reduced : he looks upon himself as nothing, and deserving of nothing ; and contents himself, under the rudest trials, with saying in the spirit of Job, *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away ; blessed be his name*, Job i. 21. Thus does he find his peace in the practice of humility.

A second effect of this virtue is to maintain a due harmony with our neighbours, with our acquaintance, with all, with whom we any ways converse. For a principal effect of this virtue is to unite mankind in the bonds of charity, and by this means to secure both religious and civil society ; very different from pride which overturns each of them. For you are conscious, my dear friends ; is it not pride, that gives birth to those dissensions and animosities among you, who, having but one God, one baptism and one faith, should have no more than one heart ? is it not pride, that feeds that spirit of malevolence, of slander, of calumny, which dishonours our religion ? and what, Christians, has so often restored tranquillity, amidst the uproar of discord, but some humble, condescending step or other, that has been taken ? *Sit down in the lowest place*, says Christ, Luke xiv. 10, if you would merit the highest. Yes ; the world itself, howsoever unjust otherwise, is equitable in this respect : it very rarely fails to pay deference to the humble.

But one of the greatest advantages of humility, and which you must feel, dear people, if not insensible to your interest, is to render God propitious. Humility draws down the divine grace and preserves it. Humility prompts the Deity to forget iniquity ; it ties up the hand of his justice, and particularly influences his mercy. So great is the power of humility with him, that even when extorted, it calms his wrath. Elias is amazed to see the impious Achab spared ; and the Lord surprised as it were, at the Prophet's wonder, says to him ; *hast thou not seen Achab humbled !* 3 Kings xxi. 29. God fails to execute his threats on the prostrate Ninivites ; Jonas repines at it ; and the Almighty makes him sensible he could not destroy a people, that was humbled before him in sack-cloth and ashes. What is there then more necessary than that christian humility, which our Saviour enforces, which reason dictates, and which our interest recommends so strongly ? But necessary as it is to be humble ; it is no less uncommon to find those, who are truly so.

To be humble, according to the scriptures, and to the conception of the holy Fathers, is, first, to despise ourselves ; secondly, to bear with joy, or at least with patience to be contemned by others ; thirdly, to refer all the good we do to God, and howsoever great may be our merit, not to attribute it to ourselves. Let us now see if these qualities be found in many of us.

The first ingredient of humility is to despise ourselves, to be convinced of our weakness. To be humble, say the Fathers, is to be little in our own eyes, to be divested of ourselves ; it is no stifle the flattering delusions of self-love ; to receive humiliations and contempt cordially, whenever God shall send them ; it is to love to be overlooked ; to live in obscurity ; and to practise with sincerity that short, but comprehensive lesson of St. Bernard, *love to be unknown*. In fine, to be humble, according to the dictates of religion, is to present ourselves before God with a full conviction of our miseries, penetrated with the sense of our unworthiness, and groaning under the weight of our iniquities.

Now, disguise a part, dear people ; is it an easy thing to find those, who thus sincerely condemn themselves, among such even, as appear the most humble ? I can readily conceive that, if you view yourselves without flattery, and according to the rules of truth, you will confess that you are objects of contempt in the sight of God. But will you patiently endure to be despised by mankind ? If not, your humility is not sterling ; it goes no further than the understanding ; it reaches not the affection ; which if it did, you would wish that all, who know you, should form the like judgment of you, as you do of yourselves.

How different alas ! are we, dear Christians, from the Saints, who, though, eminent in each virtue, were never to be satiated with humiliations : Whatever degree of merit and of grace they had attained to, they considered themselves as so many nothings, and were desirous to be seen by others in the same light. Witness St. John, the subject of this day's Gospel, who thinks himself unworthy to untie his Saviour's shoes. Witness the holy Mary, the most perfect
of

of all creatures, who amidst the encomiums of Heaven, only styles herself *the handmaid of the Lord*. Such are the sentiments of them, that were truly humble; and such must be the dispositions of all, that are animated with the spirit of humility. But are they yours, my friends? Avow the truth; and tell us honestly if you despise yourselves, and if you bear patiently to be despised by others?

For this second quality of humility is still more uncommon than the first. Many perhaps may be found so humble as to confess the truth interiorly, and condemn themselves. But where are they, that love contempt, if thrown upon them by their fellow-creatures? The church has seen Saints, who have been persecuted, traduced, disgraced, insulted for the cause of Christ, and in conformity to his example: She has seen, I say, such of all ranks and conditions, and been witness to their endeavours to make themselves contemptible, in the midst even of dignities and splendour: but where are those amongst us at present, Christians, who, although placed by providence in a state of obscurity, are willing to submit to the like confusion? O God! the Father and Protector of the truly humble, what is become of those respectable maxims of humility, of which thou thyself hast given such striking instances, both in thy life and at thy death? O holy and evangelical law! which recommendest nothing so much to us as humility, whither art thou fled? or is thy practice in discord with thy doctrine? Alas! far from seeing our modern christians eager in the pursuit of humiliations, we scarcely behold any, who, actuated by the sentiments of religion in this matter, will endure them.

It must notwithstanding be acknowledged, with St. Jerom, that there are many, who embrace the shadow, though but few regard the substance of humility. We are sensible, says this Doctor, that it is an easy matter to walk with our heads bowed downwards and our eyes fixed upon the ground; to assume an humble tone of voice, and call ourselves sinners. But these things are not worth our notice: Neither dirt nor rags must impose upon us. And why? because we are in possession of the rules, by which we may easily distinguish genuine from counterfeit humility. Thus, when I see these pretended humble ones prefer their own opinion uniformly to that of others; court contempt in appearance, and yet not bear it, when it overtakes them; pleased with the commendations lavished on themselves, and mortified at those bestowed on their neighbour; aim at nothing but the advancement of their own honour, although they wish to persuade the world they only desire the glory of God: let me tell them, I distrust such an humility; and rather aver that it contains every mark of real pride. But, without perceiving it, I have reached the third rule, that I proposed to you, to become sincerely humble; which is to refer every good to God, and whatever degree of virtue we may have arrived at, not to attribute it to ourselves.

Would you believe it however, Christians! this third quality of humility is yet more rare than the two preceding ones. Whatsoever may be our merit; had we reached even the zenith of perfection; it is certain we are but nothingness and sin. Whatever we

have beyond these is the gift of God ; to whom all the good, which we possess, must be attributed ; as all the evil, we find in us, to ourselves. Now, how few are there, who refer the honour of their respective advantages to the Almighty ? A brief detail will expose our pride.

Such a one for instance, because he is a person of some distinction ; or possessed of abilities, which his vanity flatters him are superior to what he observes in others ; thinks himself entitled to point his wit at every thing, that irritates his sarcastic humour, or does not perfectly coincide with his own sentiments. Another, because a better shaped young woman than those about her, takes upon her to turn her companions into ridicule. A third, because regular in his devotions and punctual to a nicety, without scruple censures all, whose conduct does not exactly tally with his own. Such are the abuses, that taint the characters of the generality, even of the most virtuously disposed. But candidly, dear people ; had you a little humility, would you be so blind to yourselves, and so clear-sighted in regard to others ? Would you not find employment sufficient at home, without endeavouring to pry into the conduct of your neighbours ?

For in fine, to lay a foundation for the humility, that I inculcate, you need but attend to yourselves. On whichever side you turn yourselves, you will find a thousand subjects of debasement : *thy humiliation*, says the Prophet, *is in the midst of thee*. Mich. vi. 14. And although the retrospect of your past life should not put you to the blush, cease not to humble yourselves before God, to whom all are alike indebted. Whatsoever may be your spiritual state, whether sinners or otherwise, humble yourselves. For nothing but a christian humility can procure for you the grace of God, either for conversion or perseverance.

And say not, my friends, that the practice of humility is difficult. Did I recommend to you austere mortifications or long prayers, you might justly plead exemption, either on account of the labours which you are every day obliged to undergo, or your hourly occupations, that scarcely leave you time for rest. But what can hinder you from humbling yourselves in your interior ? It requires neither health nor time : all that is wanted is a good will : *The word is nigh thee, even in thy heart*, the Apostle says, Rom. x. 8. Consider seriously what I have told you in this discourse, that nothing is more necessary than humility : so necessary, that nothing can compensate the defect of it : So necessary that this virtue can alone supply the place of every other. Be confounded at the recollection of having been hitherto so proud, in defiance of the many motives, that should have compelled you to the contrary. In a word, remember the sentence of your Redeemer ; *every one, who exalts himself, shall be humbled* : as on the other side, *he, who humbles himself, shall be exalted* in supernal glory. Luke xiv. 11.

Adorable Saviour ! who has exhorted us to learn from thy example, to be meek and humble of heart ; be it thine to open our eyes to this important, though much neglected lesson. Thou art our way, our

truth and our *life* : Suffer not these respectful qualities, which thou hast assumed for our sanctification, to be rendered useless by the malicious efforts of our enemies. Thou art our *way* : As such, lead us through those obscure and narrow paths, which thou hast trod beforehand. Instruct us, as our *truth*, in those maxims, which thou hast hidden from the wise-ones of the world. As our *life*, dispel that languor and pusillanimity, which we experience, when called upon to humble and debase ourselves. Conducted by such a guide ; taught by such a master ; actuated by such a spirit, we shall pass from the miseries of this life, to the felicity and glory of the life to come. Amen.

T H E

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On the Conditions of Penance.

Preaching the Baptism of Penance for the remission of Sins.
 Luke iii. 3.

THE lesson, dear brethren, which St. John preached on the borders of the Jordan, is a subject, that cannot be too frequently inculcated on Christians, viz. *the baptism of penance for the remission of sins* : The necessity of which penance the Evangelist plainly indicates, by calling it a baptism : for as baptism is essential to the remission of original sin ; so is penance a baptism requisite to efface the sins, which we fall into, after the acquisition of the use of reason ; especially such as destroy the grace of God. But remark, my friends, that the Fathers style repentance a laborious baptism ; to give us to understand that it requires much of us ; as I mean to shew you in this discourse ; after premising a few particulars on the admirable effects of this baptism, as enumerated in the present Gospel. And first, it has the power to do away our sins ; *preaching the baptism of penance*, St. Luke says, *for the remission of sins*.

Every page almost of the sacred writings bears witness to this truth. David, become guilty of adultery and murder, no sooner acknowledges his crime, than the prophet gives him the happy assurance that God has pardoned him : *The Lord has taken away thy sin*. 2 Kings xii. 13. *If the wicked man do penance for his sins, he shall live, and shall not die*, Ezech. xviii. 21. This is that sovereign remedy, which so many saints have successfully made use of, to efface their sins.

Like

Like David; Ezechias grieves; and like him, obtains mercy. Manasses, insolent in prosperity, in his chains finds the secret to move the Almighty by his tears. Peter denies his Master; he repents; he is forgiven. These examples, Christians, may suffice to convince you that penance remits your sins. Let us proceed therefore to its second effect, which is to fill the soul with virtue.

Every valley shall be filled. Alas! brethren, what a dismal vacuity does sin leave in the soul? Divine love alone can fill the heart of man. Does the love of the world usurp its seat? It exiles every virtue, and banishes them far from him; until the efficacy of penance once more restores them to him. For instance; previously to his repentance, the bowels of that miser were closed, were impenetrable to his neighbour's indigence; behold! now he is become charitable, compassionate, and liberal. Before his conversion, such a one was addicted to impurity, to drunkenness, to quarrelling; but his repentance has made him chaste, sober and patient under injuries. Thus it is it fills up every valley; for God will occupy the void, that sin had occasioned in the soul; whence follows another effect of penance, which is to humble the sinner, and render him entirely submissive to the mandates of the Deity.

Every mountain and bill shall be brought low. Throughout the sacred volumes, pride is delineated by these aspiring emblems; pride, I say, the source and origin of all sin. This is the Colossus we must attack, and which we happily bring down by penance; since it is then we practise the most heroic act of humility, by not only stooping to God, but likewise prostrating ourselves at the feet of a mortal, weak, sinful man, like ourselves. It is thus the humility of repentance levels the stupendous mountains of human pride.

After this, can we entertain a doubt but penance straightens and rectifies all our actions? *The crooked ways shall be made straight*; or rather does it not go further? and this is its ultimate effect; *the rough ways shall be made plain*; which is to say, it will smooth down to you whatever difficulties you may experience, in the practice of virtue: the yoke of the Lord, that you thought so heavy, will appear light: no obstacle shall present itself you will not easily surmount; no temptation you will not baffle. Thus you will await the approach of death confidently, and without the fear of being surprized: On the contrary, the sanctity of your lives will make you long for it: you will sigh for the possession of your Saviour, who perfects the desires of all that return to him by repentance: *All flesh shall see the Salvation of God.*

From this concise explication of our Gospel, dear people, it is easy to perceive the necessity of penance, and of what importance it is not to be mistaken in our notions on so essential a point. As to its necessity, I shall here say nothing further, having sufficiently enlarged on that head elsewhere: but I will confine myself at present to point out to you the conditions that should accompany it; imploring in the first place the light of Heaven, for our direction.

Although

Although our Mother, the Church, my friends, has thought proper to recede, in favour of her children, from the severity of the ancient penitential discipline, she has not however dismissed her pristine sentiments in this regard. Whence, in our days still, as I may say, the Council of Trent instructs us that our repentance must in some sense be proportioned to our sins. But what conditions are required to make it so? Not to be diffuse, I reduce them to three. First, our repentance must be internal; *i. e.* it must be seated in the heart. Secondly, it must be external; *i. e.* it must shew itself outwardly. And lastly, it must be so peculiarly adapted, as to be a remedy to the failings of each individual in particular. Let us now investigate these conditions briefly.

I say then first, dear Christians, that if you desire, that your repentance should be acceptable to the Almighty, it must be internal: by which I mean that, as soon as we are conscious of having offended God by the guilt of mortal sin, we must instantly be sorry for it; bewail our misfortune in the secret of our hearts; form inwardly a resolution rather to die a thousand times than wilfully fall into the like snares again; avoid such places, renounce such company, abjure such occasions, as have unhappily betrayed us: and above all, exert ourselves to change our hearts effectually, that they may in future hate sincerely what they have hitherto loved passionately.

For in this regard, my brethren, we must take care not to be deluded. The sole residence of this interior penance, of which I speak, is the heart. We may impose on man by appearances: but it is impossible to deceive a God, who beholds the heart and penetrates into its most secret windings. It was this that induced the Prophet, in tracing the outlines of this virtue, to begin by delineating its inward dispositions; *rend your hearts*, Joel ii. 13. This is the first step to be taken in our repentance: a truth of which David, whom I may justly style a model of a true conversion, was fully satisfied. Covered with confusion for his sin, he clothes himself with sackcloth, he mortifies his flesh, he waters his couch with his tears: It is not this, however, that he principally depends on to assuage God's anger, and excite his compassion: He does not say; thou wilt not condemn, O Lord, my body covered with haircloth, my breast discoloured by bruises, my eyes bathed in tears; but he exclaims with confidence; *a contrite and humbled heart thou wilt not despise*; Ps. l. I know the immolation of victims will not please thee; *with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted*, Ib.; but the sacrifice, that is agreeable to thee, my God! and which will reach thy throne in the odour of sweetness, is *an afflicted spirit*.

Do not imagine, however, Christians, that by this I mean to exclude from repentance the satisfactory works of mortification and self-denial. The holy Ghost, who exhorts us to *rend our hearts* with compunction, and *not our garments*, informs us likewise that this inward penance must be manifested outwardly, *by fasting, by weeping, and by mourning*. From what I have advanced then, concerning internal repentance, you are not to conclude that nothing external is required; but rather that, whatever is done in this regard, should be

be done properly : to accomplish which, my friends, I will now lay before you some rules for your direction.

And first I affirm as incontestable, that no repentance can be sincere, which does not bear a proportion to the crimes committed : it is an illusion to suppose that those persons, who have sinned grievously, are not obligated to a more austere penance, than such as are guilty only of lesser faults. This is the doctrine of St. Cyprian, whose assertion will be always true, that the *penance must not be less than the crime*.

A second rule is, that repentance is not to be perfected so quickly as some Christians would suppose ; who, after a protracted course of sin, would persuade themselves that a moment is sufficient to change them into true penitents. What a delusion, brethren, to think that, after having lived in the habit of vice for ten or twenty years, we need but an hour to confess, perform our penance and complete our reconciliation ? No ; this is not the idea the holy Fathers have left us of repentance. In their conception, it was requisite to employ much time in weeping and in mourning ; nay, the whole of life they deemed too short to bewail some particular transgressions. *Him I call a penitent*, says St. Ambrose, *who spends his days and nights in grieving ; who abhors the evil he has done ; who declares war against his passions ; who renounces his pleasures*. You have employed a length of time in offending God ; is it not then equitable you should do the like in making satisfaction to him ? You have long continued in a state of sin ; is it not therefore reasonable you should be a long while in doing penance also ?

Such was the practice of the ancient church, in those happy days, in which the culprit's sole desire was to be cured of his wounds ; in this respect very unlike the penitents of our times ; who, to all appearance, dread nothing so much as to be emancipated from their sins : and for yourselves, my dear people, what would be your sentiments, were you to be treated according to the rigour of the primitive discipline ? You, who have such an aversion to any penance in the least degree mortifying, what would you say, if, for a sin of impurity, you were secluded from entering the house of worship for seven years, as in those days, and obliged to take your station in the porch, surrounded by the badges of repentance ? What would you think if, for other crimes, that are deemed far less considerable, you were sentenced to a forty days fast, or to a penance of three years continuance. And what ! Is not the Deity still the same ? Is sin a less insult to him than it was ? or has it lost any thing of its enormity ? Both God and sin then being the same, is it not reasonable that we should make a like satisfaction, as formerly, to the same Lord, for the like crimes ? God forbid however, Christians, that by this I should be understood to censure the conduct of the Church, that indulgent mother, in mitigating the rigour of her penances. All I aim at is, by laying before you the severity of primitive times, to raise in you a salutary confusion for a thing you make so little account of ; and incline you to receive with submission, and perform with punctuality the penances enjoined you in the Confessional.

A third

A third rule, which I think essential, is that penance should be done cheerfully and with a good heart. Where observe, brethren, that in condemning dejection in repentance, I do not speak of that *sorrow*, which St. Paul says, is *according to God*; and which proceeds solely from grief for having offended him; such a sorrow, as this, has deserved the approbation of the Holy Ghost. But the sorrow, I would banish from repentance, is that which, at the first entrance on the road of virtue, disconcerts the sinner and discourages him, by representing penance as impracticable, and consequently inducing him to throw aside the good resolves he had so happily taken up. And this, without doubt, was the evil that our Saviour meant to obviate, when he enjoined us in fasting to anoint our heads and wash our faces: as if he had commanded us to undertake our penance with courage and to accomplish it with joy.

Oh, my dear friends! how happy should I be, could I satisfactorily describe to you the lovely sweetness, the ineffable consolations, that soften and temper the austerities of penance. Yes; a truly repenting soul experiences far more comfort in its tears, in its self-denials, and other penitential exercises, than the worldling in his feasting, his assemblies, and similar amusements. *My tears*, says the convert David, *have been my bread day and night*. Ps. xli. 4. Such is the disposition of a soul pierced with grief for having lost her God by sin: she finds no solid pleasure, but in her tears and repentance. Diversions become irksome to her: and if circumstances compel her to be sometimes present at them, it is her greatest mortification. And whence this change? Because she now loves her God: it is his sacred charity that works this amazing alteration, and makes her embrace that, which would otherwise seem insupportable.

Let us then study, Christians, the repentance of Zacheus, and admire how *he received his Saviour into his house with joy*: Not with a base and servile fear; but *with a great and willing heart*; which David terms the fat of the victim, *the marrow of the sacrifice*, and which the Deity accepts with complacency; *for God loveth a cheerful giver*. 2 Cor. ix. 7.

Finally, the last, and most essential of the conditions annexed to penance, is that it should afford us remedies against sin. It is the remark of St. Gregory, that the Son of God, in coming into the world in quality of the physician of our souls, has prescribed different remedies according to our different ailments; that he recommends continence to the lustful; liberality to the avaricious; meekness to the passionate, and humility to the proud. The same is the example we propose to ourselves, when we enjoin certain penances in the tribunal of reconciliation: and the like motive should engage you, my brethren, to accept them with resignation, and perform them with fidelity. Howsoever unpalatable the remedy may appear, consider it as necessary. If you would re-establish the health of your soul, the occasion of your sin, says the wise man, must be the instrument of your penance: *by what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented*. Wis. xi. 17.

Every

Every true penitent, like David, must conceive a perfect hatred for sin : *I have hated them*, he says, *with a perfect hatred*, Ps. cxxviii. 22. Now, to have a perfect hatred for sin, we must persecute it, we must punish it in the members, that have contributed to commit it. Such is the doctrine of the great Apostle ; *as you have used your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity* ; so now make use of them to the purposes of justice and piety. Rom. vi. 19.

But alas ! dear Christians, how remote are you from these dispositions ? widely different from the penitents of primitive days ; who, in expiating their sins, breathed nothing but sufferings and mortifications ; scarcely is your hand uplifted to chastise yourselves, but you draw it down again, and still you have done enough. Nevertheless, say what you will, consult whom you please ; I know no remedy, but this of penance, to reinstate us in the grace of God, when lost by sin. Could you be saved by any other means, that might be more agreeable to you, my entire consent could not be wanting. But this I know, and I should be sorry you should be ignorant of it, that it is an irreversible decree of the divine justice, that he, who would not preserve the health of his soul when he might, must suffer, and endure the cutting anguish of repentance, before he can recover it. The remedy, I agree with you, is severe ; but to render it less difficult, imitate the conduct of a person in debt, and who is determined to satisfy his creditors : to-day he lays by something, and again something to-morrow, in order to extricate himself from his difficulties and to pay them by degrees. Deprive yourselves in a like manner, sometimes of this pleasure ; at other times of that company, in which you take so much satisfaction. Above all, receive with submission whatever afflictions the Almighty may please to portion out to you ; sickness, to make amends for illicit pleasures ; the loss of riches, to atone for the excessive attachment, you have had to them ; affronts, slanders, calumnies, to satisfy for the various sins, in which you have had the misfortune to be involved. In short, endeavour to exonerate yourselves of the whole load, for which you stand indebted to the sovereign justice. Unhappy the man, whose life terminates in virtuous purposes, in pious resolutions, in promises and empty desires of conversion. As on the other hand, happy he, whose works are the substantial and solid fruits of his repentance.

Why then, my friends, do you hesitate to espouse the part of penance ? Is it not yet time to banish sin from your hearts, of which it has so long usurped the dominion ? *that sin may have an end*, as the prophet Daniel says. Is it not time to purify your souls from iniquity, that justice, *everlasting justice*, may supply its place. Do you not hear the voice of your Saviour, crying out to you ; *Son, give me thy heart*, Prov. xxiii. 26. Redeemed as you are, by the blood of God's own beloved Son, yield to his tender solicitations. Repair by a true repentance whatever breach of faith you stand convicted of in his regard. Give him your whole heart ; that he may take entire possession of it now, and preserve it throughout that eternity of happiness ; to which I entreat him in his mercy to conduct you all hereafter. Amen.

T H E

T H E

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF CHRISTMAS.

On Sufferings and Afflictions.

And thine own Soul a sword shall pierce. Luke ii. 25:

AMIDST such a variety of important subjects, as the Gospel, read on this Sunday, exhibits, it is proper to single out the most instructive, as I purpose here to do in a few words.

The holy Simeon, having prophesied that the Son, *the light for the revelation of the Gentiles*, should be set up for a sign *to be contradicted*, turning to the mother, says to her; *and thine own soul a sword shall pierce*. What tongue shall tell the anguish, this Sacred Mother experienced, when she followed her beloved Son, from the first stage of his cruel passion, to the conclusion of that inhuman tragedy, on the fatal cross? Now if the very Mother of Christ, my brethren, altogether perfect as she was, is not privileged from sufferings, with what face shall we dare to spurn at afflictions? Let us learn, says St. Chrysostom, that if the Lord did not exempt his own Mother from the pangs of adversity: What do I say! If he compelled her to drink deeper of the bitter chalice of his passion than any other mortal; let us learn that the surest proof God can give us of his love is to make us pass through the ordeal of grief and sorrow. Such, Christians, is the lesson I design
to

to read to you at present ; for which purpose I will endeavour to convince you of two essential truths, of which we have but a very imperfect feeling ; the first of which is that, if the sufferings, with which the Lord afflicts us, are so highly advantageous, they are indubitable proofs of his love : The second, that the most certain evidence we can give of loving God, is to bear up with a Christian patience under the crosses, he is pleased to lay upon us. Pattern of resignation, Heavenly Saviour ! instruct us in this divine science, as we now devoutly entreat thee.

To taste the sweets of life, without its bitters ; to possess the riches of the earth undisturbed ; to enjoy a brilliant fortune peaceably ; to spend your days in luxury : in these things, perchance, you imagine that happiness consists : But I, my friends, here venture to hold a different language to you. To find under our steps only thorns and crosses ; to be born, and live in obscurity and contempt ; to see ourselves, notwithstanding our most industrious efforts, the victims of penury and indigence ; to be tried by incessant sufferings and tribulations : these are the ingredients of true happiness, according to the Lord. Fatal self-love ! these principles shock thee, I am sensible : Nor do I wonder at it. Religion alone can render such harsh and austere maxims palatable, and convince us that afflictions are the dearest pledges of God's love ; by discovering to us that they are, first, a defence against vice, and secondly, a nursery for virtue.

Be not surprized, dear Christians, to hear me, at the commencement of this instruction, tell you that the sufferings, with which the Almighty visits us in this life, are in effect so many graces. To call us to himself, the Deity makes use of three different means ; the eternal grace of inspiration ; the external grace of his sacred word and good example ; and the grace of adversity ; which, although the least honourable, is frequently the most effectual and conducive to salvation. And this, my brethren, is so true that I may say with safety that, as prosperity is the nurse of every vice, so adversity is that double-edged sword, which destroys the greatest part of them.

And in fact, does not experience evince, that prosperity is a soil in which every passion thrives ? For example, pride, ambition, intemperance, &c. But does not the same experience tell us that adversity checks the whole of them ? You are surprized, for instance, that such a one, whose vanity once made him insupportable, is now so modest ; that this other person, so passionate and brutal, is become so meek and peaceable ; that a third, whose intemperance was almost a general nuisance, is at present so sober and regular : Be surprized, if you please ; for my part, I by no means wonder at it. How can they persist in their criminal habits, when deprived of the means of sinning ? An unexpected failure has blasted the hopes of that aspiring and proud young fellow, and where shall his haughtiness now find fuel ? How shall that violent man, or that drunkard, indulge his passion, or his love of liquor, reduced as they are to the bed of sorrow ? Inasmuch that there is a kind of necessity to such, as are oppressed with affliction, to turn aside from the haunts of vice. If so, my God ! hear the prayer of a
Pastor

Pastor in behalf of his misguided sheep. Pain ! sickness ! adversity ! come and touch that ambitious heart, to make it humble ; that impure heart, to make it chaste ; that hard and unfeeling heart, to make it compassionate and awake to misery. For such is the effect of sufferings, to furnish us with arms against sin.

And here, my dear people, which of you will deny the truth of what I say ? Many serious exhortations and pious discourses have been delivered to you ; but when did you pay attention to them ? Was it not when the world began to frown upon you ; when the hand of God depressed you ; when your circumstances were embarrassed ; when distress embittered your unlawful pleasures ? In the days of your prosperity, both the promises and the terrors of the gospel were exhibited in vain, to stop you in the course of perdition, in which you were running. You said to yourselves, what does the preacher mean ? Does he imagine I will sacrifice my pleasure and my wealth to him ? *I spoke to thee in thy prosperity*, says the prophet, *and thou saidst I will not hear* ; Jer. xxii. 21. When you had but to listen to your passions, as youth seemed to authorize you, I undertook, to my confusion, to disgust you of vice and induce you to embrace a life of virtue. You answered me, *I will not hear* : But now, my friends, that sin has failed you, and the world is turned against you, you see your error, and your salvation is at hand.

Doubly then unhappy such of you, dear Christians, as know not how to take advantage of the afflictions, which the Lord, in his mercy, lays upon you. If they cannot operate to your conversion, what will their effect be ? Hear and tremble : they will confirm you in vice, as they did Israel ; they will harden you, as they did Pharaoh ; they will increase your impiety, as they augmented that of Ahab. Let these instances suffice, if not to make you fear for the time past, at least to make you shudder for that to come.

But if adversity be so effectual in correcting us of our vices, it is no less useful in supplying us with proper means to arrive at a just degree of sanctity ; since in her school such virtues are taught as, of all others, are the least liable to suspicion. Let us not boast, Christians, of being naturally virtuous ; on the contrary, let us confess that virtue is always dearly bought ; even by such as are the most happily inclined to it. Nay, how often do we spurn at such afflictions, as are dealt out to us by the Almighty, with the sole design to initiate us in virtue ? He must habituate us to them : He must lead us to the cross, in spite of ourselves, as he said to Peter. Let us candidly acknowledge, brethren, that, of ourselves, we should not take the way of tribulation, to come at virtue : but by means of some inevitable sufferings, endured most commonly with impatience, the practice of it becomes easy by degrees : in which situation we exclaim with David, and in similar sentiments ; O Lord ! it is by the way of afflictions thou hast found the means to break asunder the bonds, that attached me to the world.

No, it is not possible to deny it ; and if we are sincere, we must allow that the very moment, in which we complain of the severity of our God, is that instant, in which he exhibits his mercy and his goodness in our be-
half

half in the strongest light : If he wounds us in a tender part ; as by the death, for example, of a darling child ; or of an affectionate and well-deserving husband ; by the total ruin of our affairs or the like, what does he intend by treating us with such apparent rigour, but to compel us to turn to him, to fear him and to serve him ? How far more deplorable, Christians, would your situation be, was he to execute in your regard the threat, with which he formerly menaced his people ? *My jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be angry no more.* Ezech. xv. 42. I will no more vent my indignation on you, nor shall you continue to feel the effects of my wrath. Oh, my dear friends ! may the divine, goodness ever preserve us from so rude a treatment. What would have become of the prodigal son, had he not been pressed by hunger ? Would he have ever returned to his father, but for that circumstance ? Would not you yourselves think that case desperate, in which the medical faculty should refuse to prescribe ? The Lord knows your wounds, says St. Augustine ; ought you then to object to his making due incisions ? Is not his severity in this case an undoubted proof both of his clemency and love ? In these moments of trial and pain say to him ; my God ! it is thy part to dispose of all things, according to thy holy will ; I am in thy hands, as a creature unworthy of thy favours ; but how great a favour is it that thou dost think of my salvation, and dost oblige me to think of it likewise ! I adore thee, and I bless thee in my sufferings and sorrows.

And surely, Christians, who among you would refuse to adopt these sentiments of gratitude, was he to reflect that the humiliations and afflictions, which befall him here below, may be at once the means and the cause of his sincere return to God ? They inspire repentance : they convince us that the Lord is both just and merciful : Evils and remedies at the same time : painful in their nature, and meritorious by your patience ; they are the most certain means to draw us near to our Maker ; if we are but so happy as not to impede their operation, by our murmurs and complaints.

Another prodigy, brethren, of the love and mercy of our God. He knows that the virtue, which is untried, is not to be depended on. Wherefore, to refine and perfect it, he makes us pass through the furnace of tribulation. And indeed, the experience of all ages tells us that it is the province of adversity to lop off from virtue whatever may be attached to it of human growth, and embellish it with each additional and divine ornament : that nothing but the fire of affliction can purify us from some certain stains, from which not even genuine virtue is exempted : that sufferings alone can destroy whatever there is of vice in our constitution, of haughtiness in our temper, of perverseness in our humour, of singularity in our conduct : So that the whole man is renewed, as I may, say, by adversity : Whence St. James encourages us to esteem ourselves truly happy, when the hand of God presses heavily upon us ; *count it all joy, he says, when you fall into divers temptations.* James i. 2.

Similar, no doubt, were the sentiments of the great St. Augustine, when, explaining those words of the Psalmist, *thou wast a merciful God*

to them ; taking vengeance on all their inventions. Ps. xcvi. 8. Where is the mercy, he asks, if the Lord takes vengeance ? Who is ignorant, he replies that God is merciful, both when he forgives and when he punishes sin ? And how so ? because he exchanges the severe chastisement, our crimes had merited, for light and trivial correction. It is thus, O God ! thou dost signalize thy bounty to us ; acting like a prudent creditor, who treats his neglectful debtor with severity, to prevent his being ruined by a false and misplaced indulgence. Afflict me then, O Lord ! I am convinced that sufferings are the pledges of thy love : but increase my patience, that I may be enabled to offer thee the proofs of my sincere gratitude and affection, under all the trials that may befall me.

First then, dear friends, I say we love our maker truly, when we bear afflictions cheerfully for his sake ; because then we submit our will to his. When we are at our ease, when every thing goes on smoothly and according to our wish, oh ! how hard it is to know whether we really love God or not ? It is much to be apprehended we are of the number of those Samaritans, who called themselves the allies and friends of the Jews, when prosperous ; but who abandoned those connecting titles, when Israel was in disgrace and humiliation. This is perhaps the picture, brethren, of your conduct towards the Deity, when every thing succeeds to your inclination. If your will be conformable to his, it is because he first accommodates his will to yours. If you adore his beneficent hand, it is because it is extended over you, to crown you with blessings. If you walk unceasingly in the paths of justice, it is because he makes you feel your satisfaction in it, and shews you virtue in all her charms.

Now, such a piety, as I have here described, I cannot, I confess, but regard with a distrustful eye. For how can I tell but this zeal in fulfilling your duties originates in interest ? how can I tell but complacency and self-approbation are the prompters of your good works ? how can I tell, in fine, but you are like those, of whom the Prophet Zacharias says, that they blessed the Lord, because he procured them good things and temporal riches ? Without doubt, it is a very easy matter to be deceived. But when the Almighty loads us with crosses and afflictions ; when he permits some unforeseen accident to lead us to the brink of ruin ; when he unbinds the tongue of obloquy and defamation : if, in those trying moments, you submit like Job, and kiss the hand that strikes you, then you may with confidence assure yourselves that you love God sincerely.

This testimony, Christians, he himself formerly rendered to Abraham, under the severest proof, perhaps, that could possibly be made of the affection of a parent. Abraham, the Lord says to him, thy prompt and blind obedience to my rigorous injunctions is to me a convincing evidence of the love thou bearest me ; *Now I have known that thou fearest God.* Gen. xxii. 12. When I heaped the most distinguishing favours on thee and thy family ; when I blessed thy labours ; when I promised thee a numerous posterity ; finally, when nothing called thee to use violence to thy nature, there was room to question the sincerity of thy heart. But now, when solely to please me, in defiance of thy feelings, thou dost sacrifice

sacrifice to me thy son Isaac, the object of thy dearest wishes, I can no longer hesitate : thou certainly fearest me, and lovest me still more. *Now I have known that thou fearest God.*

Happy, my dear people, and a thousand times happy, if tried as Abraham was, you shall have been, like him, sound faithful. When oppressed with sickness, and groaning under the decay of a shattered constitution ; if, in spite of the severity of your sufferings, you offer the remainder of life to the Lord ; then I will say to you, *Now I have known thou fearest God.* When pining with secret anguish at the licentious behaviour of a child, or of the profligacy or bad usage of a husband ; if, in these circumstances, you raise up your hands to him, who alone can turn their hearts ; then, to sooth the bitterness of your sorrows, I will tell you, *Now I know thou fearest God.* When reduced to poverty by the rapaciousness of your creditors, by the villainy of your debtors, by an unforeseen misfortune ; if you bear up under this state of misery without impatience, I will justly address to you those words, *Now I know thou fearest God.*

But are you desirous, Christians, to give your Lord still more evident proofs of your love ? regulate your lives upon his model. The saints and martyrs thought they could not more effectually shew their love for him, than by suffering. To suffer for Christ was the summit of their joy. They considered the instant of their death as the opening of their triumph. The affronts, which they solicited so eagerly, were as so many titles to them, on which they plumed themselves. " I am no longer surpris'd, cries out St. Augustine, to see Paul experience such unspeakable joy in the midst of crosses and tribulations ; *for he knew for whom he suffered.*"

Now if these generous heroes of Christianity endured so much, let us not suppose that we shall be exempted. Jesus Christ was their model, and he is ours likewise. But as Jesus Christ became our Redeemer only by the cross, we can have no relation to him but by the same means. The disciple is not greater than the master ; the members must be conformable to the head. Now who is Christ ? and who am I ? What does he endure ? Very much. What do I suffer ? Extremely little.

For in fine, let us not wish, says the Apostle, to deceive ourselves. We neither shall, nor can have any share in the glory of our Divine Master, but in proportion to the part, we shall have born in his humiliations ; *if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.* 2 Tim. ii. 11. Afflictions alone can purchase the crown of immortal bliss. *If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.* In a word, to be of the number of the elect, we must be marked with the stamp of grief. For to belong to Christ, we must do what Christ did. To call ourselves Christians, to adore this God of Sorrows in a superficial manner, to shew a respect to the sign of our redemption is not sufficient. Is it possible to adore sincerely what we do not love ; to love what we do not imitate ; to imitate what we do not esteem ; to esteem what we dislike and abhor ?

How much then is it to be wished, my brethren, that you would turn to profit all the crosses, which the Almighty lays upon you ? But alas !

how remote are you from this desirable submission ? does any calamity befall you ? Every thing dejects, every thing overpowers you. The slightest indisposition is frequently a cause of endless murmurings. We are perpetually complaining either of the severity of Heaven, or the persecutions of mankind : As if we could be crowned without fighting : as if, to reign with Christ, we were not to suffer with him. Agree with me then, Christians, that you cannot evince your love for God more sincerely than by imitating him in his sufferings. He suffered through love : Let the like motive animate you under afflictions. Say to him from your hearts ; spare me not, O Lord ! lead me from sorrow to sorrow, from tribulation to tribulation ; these will dispose me to sanctify thy holy name. Sufferings ! humiliations ! pains ! crosses ! adversity ! You have been the sole delight of my God ; be then henceforth the only portion of my inheritance.

As to the rest, my dear friends, have no apprehensions about your weakness : lay all distrustful thoughts at the feet of the Almighty. If he permits Job to be tempted, it is because he knows that he has endued him with a strength and grace sufficient to resist. He numbers your pains : he weighs your crosses. If he strikes he does not mean to destroy you : but only to apply proper remedies to your ailments. He is with you in the moment of your sufferings : *I am with him in his trouble.* Pf. xc. 15. Does he not say of Joseph, that he was present to him in the obscurity of his dungeon, that he encouraged, that he supported him ? Does he not go with Daniel into the den of the lions ? Does he not damp the flames of the fiery furnace, in behalf of the three young Hebrews ? Once more then, fear nothing. God is faithful to his promises. He will not permit you to be tempted above your strength ; but will proportion his graces to your wants, and bring your trials to a favourable issue.

Listen not then to us, O Lord ! when we complain. Pursue the plan of thy adorable designs, and whatever the execution of it may cost us, complete it for thy glory, and our eternal welfare. Amen.

T H E

FIRST SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY;
Or, WITHIN THE OCTAVE.

On the Education of Children.

*And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem,
according to the custom of the feast. Luke ii. 42.*

TH E conduct of Joseph and Mary, in regard to their Son Jesus, exhibits a matter of instruction of the most important nature ; viz the obligation incumbent on parents of taking their children with them to the house of God, as soon as they become susceptible of the impressions of religion, and of habituating them to bear the yoke of the Lord from their tender infancy.

How many parents notwithstanding are there, whose last care is to bring up their offspring in the fear of God, and in the practice of the holy precepts of his law ? Can we be surpris'd then to see that some children treat their parents with disrespect, from want of affection ; or that others are ignorant and unprincipled, from the defect of instruction in the documents of religion ? After Mary had given her Son Jesus to the world, she never quitted him. Learn hence, ye parents, to model your little innocents under your own inspection ; or at least to trust them to those only, whose virtue you may rely on.

But to set this matter in a proper light ; I distinguish, brethren, two sorts of demands your children have upon you ; viz. temporal and spiritual demands. By the first you are required to attend to their education and establishment in the world : By the second, to form them to

piety and train them up to virtue : two duties, that shall make the subject of this discourse ; after soliciting the sovereign aid of the Father of Lights.

As my first part regards solely the temporal duties, which parents owe to their offspring, I shall confine it to two heads : First, you must support and maintain your children ; Secondly, you must provide for their establishment, according to the rules of christian prudence. Fathers and mothers ! be attentive ; the obligations, I am about to unfold, are indispensable in your regard.

St. Paul recommends to christian parents no one point so much as this ; take care of, support, educate your children. Why enforce so earnestly, says St. Chrysostom, what Nature should have engraved on every heart ? To awaken, he replies, in certain callous bosoms, those sentiments of humanity, which vice and dissipation will sometimes lull to sleep. But wherefore does that God, whose infinite wisdom directs the whole creation, permit man, in this respect different from other animals, to come into the world without being able to provide for his own subsistence ? “ Man, says Lactantius, cast away, as it were, on the rock of human misery, by an unfortunate shipwreck, can neither bear the injuries of the weather, nor procure himself proper food.” But does this mean, my brethren, that God abandons us at our birth ; Us, I say, who are infinitely more dear to him, than those vile creatures, for whose wants he provides so amply ? No : but only that his providence unloads itself, so to speak, of all these cares on those, who have given us life ; and that, incapacitated as we are, to help ourselves, he intrusts us to the vigilance and natural affection of our parents. For if the most savage beasts are so careful of their young, as to shelter them, at their own peril, from every danger ; how great must we conclude, ought to be the solicitude of parents in this respect ?

But perhaps, Christians, you suspect me of going too far ; and of attributing to fathers and mothers such sentiments, as they are utterly unacquainted with. Alas ! I wish to God it was so, and that no instances could be produced of those inhuman parents, who fly openly in the face of a duty so essential. But experience shews the contrary. Witness those neglectful mothers ; who, in their wanton indifference, care little for what regards their children ; and after depriving them, during their lives, of every necessary, reduce them, at their deaths, to indigence and misery : Witness those slothful fathers ; whom the conviction of the wants of their tender offspring cannot prevail upon to work : Witness those gamblers, those libertines, those drunkards, who consume in one day the earnings of their week ; who spend in riot, in a tap-room, the money, which the labour of an industrious wife has brought them in ; whilst their family is in tears, and their young ones clamorous for want of bread. Now is it so uncommon, brethren, I ask, to find parents of this description ? Did you never know such persons ? May I not say there are but too many of them, who, unsolicitous for the helpless innocents to whom they have given birth, of consequence are very far from thinking of providing a maintenance for them, as a second duty requires ?

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When I tell you, friends, you are bound to provide for the future establishment of your children, I would not be understood to insinuate that you must make a resignation in their favour of whatever you possess. No: it is neither equitable nor prudent to reduce yourselves to a state of dependence on them. But what is just, and conformable both to piety and good sense is, that parents should allot a due proportion of their wealth to the purpose of procuring their children a maintenance, suitable to their expectations and way of life. And here reason pleads their cause. For either your parents, brethren, settled you during their lifetime, or they did not. If they favoured you with such a proof of their affection, is it not reasonable that you should give a similar evidence of love to your little ones? If not, you must have felt the inconveniences of their neglect, and are bound in injustice to preserve others from the like. For what obligations will your children have to you, if you only leave them your wealth, because you cannot carry it with you to the grave?

But, Christians, not to deceive yourselves on this point, it must be the part of prudence to determine on the measures most advisable to be taken; that you may not err, either through defect, in abandoning your offspring from insensibility; or through excess, in bringing them up by criminal ways, at the expence of conscience. Thus, the love of your children engages you to use your endeavours to procure them whatever is necessary to settle them properly: A care, which I have already said, is just and reasonable; under two restrictions, mind; of which the first is, that it be regulated, so as not to degenerate into anxiety and inquietude; which must affect your peace of mind, and occasion you to offend God. For, parents! what will it avail you to pile up treasures for your children, if they give cause to your being precipitated into the flames of hell? Be careful to lay up a provision for them; there can be no objection to this: but carry not this care so far, as to wound your conscience, or commit any injustice. The second thing which the love, you owe to your progeny, requires of you, is equality. Shew no more affection to one child, than to another. Avoid those partialities, that often occasion a deal of mischief. Because you have a predilection for one of them, you rob the others, to enrich the favourite. They are all your children equally; love them all then equally, and provide for each of them according to your abilities.

What shall I say, dear people, of those parents, who are so attentive to themselves only, that, rather than incur any inconvenience, they leave their children without a due provision? Are you parents? I am sensible you are not obligated to distress yourselves for the sake of your family: I will allow that frequent instances of the unnatural behaviour of children, towards those, to whom they owe their existence, should make you cautious not to hazard a probability of the like misfortune. But when an opportunity offers of disposing of a daughter, why do you neglect it? When you can settle your son, why do you not? Your circumstances are low, you say; it may be so: Your children have no claim till after your death; I know it. But if the legislature is silent in their behalf, it is because it supposed your natural feelings would suffice to guide you in the observance of this duty. The law
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of man, it is true, lays no injunction on you ; but the law of nature, its superior, exacts this obligation of you.

To be short then, Christians, make use of your prudence. If, on the one side, it dictates to you that a sordid avarice, which restrains you from providing for your offspring in a proper manner, is highly criminal in the sight of God ; it informs you, on the other, that to advance them by illicit measures is to plunge both yourselves and them into eternal flames. Store up riches for them and welcome ; but never at the risk of conscience and salvation. The wealth, you have thus heaped up, shall moulder away. God himself assures you so : *Evil shall come upon thee*, he says, *and thou shalt not know its rising*. *Is. xlvii. 11.* You may attribute it to the perverseness of the times, to the malice of an enemy, to the extravagance of your family : whilst it originates wholly in your rapacity and injustice. But does all the care of parents centre here ? No, my friends ; besides promoting the temporal welfare of your children with a reasonable prudence, you must endeavour to advance their spiritual interest with a christian fidelity.

You are bound then to love your offspring, not only with a natural affection, as reason prompts ; but with a christian love also, as suggested by the Gospel. Now what does religion dictate in regard to their spiritual wants ? Two things, brethren, which I beg you to remark attentively, as they involve your destiny. First, you must model them to virtue and piety ; you must instruct and enlighten their ignorance. Secondly, you must correct their faults charitably, and strive to reform them by your own good conduct.

As nothing, St. Augustine says, is dearer to christian parents than their children ; so nothing should be more interesting to them than to initiate them in virtue early. It is their province to kindle in those little bosoms the chaste flames of divine charity ; that, by a consonance of desires, they may all be brought to the common centre of their love.

Conceive, if possible, dear Christians, of what importance it is to begin betimes to impress the love of virtue on their pliant hearts. St. Ambrose in his commentary on the 118th Psalm says, that as the habit of reading and writing becomes natural, and is never to be lost, especially when acquired in youth, it is the same with the divine precepts. Such as are tinged with them in their infancy, retain them always. No ; the detail would have no end, was I to undertake to particularize all you are obliged to do, to train up your children to the service of their Maker. You must repeat to them from their most tender years, and repeat a hundred times a day, if I may so speak, that they must prefer the Deity and his commands to every thing : that they should have more respect and love for him than for yourselves : that He alone claims an unlimited deference : that they owe no obedience to you in such things as clash with his holy law : that they must prefer themselves to no one, but must yield to all, and esteem each one more than themselves : that if they receive an injury, they must not resent it : how laudable moreover would it be to teach them to pre-engage by some acts of kindness all such as may have used them ill ?

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By this however, brethren, do not imagine that I mean to lay any additional burthen on you. Turn over the sacred books, and you will every where find what I say to be the established word of God. Remember what I am going to do, he says to Moses; *and thou shalt tell thy sons and grandsons.* Exod. x. 1. *When you have entered the promised land, if your children say to you, what is the meaning of this service? You shall say to them, it is the victim of the passage of the Lord.* Exod. xii. 26. The like things are frequently repeated in various other passages; to make you sensible, parents, that the first, and the most important of your concerns should be to instil into your children, not the sciences of the world, but the truths of our religion; to instruct them not so much in what regards your profession, as in the rudiments of our faith and the purity of our morals. You teach your little pupils to gain a temporal livelihood; and you do right to inure them betimes to labour: but you should be far more desirous to inform them how to earn heaven, paradise, eternal happiness. If you are truly good parents and good christians, you ought above all things to pay a particular attention to their spiritual advancement; to prefer that momentous affair to every thing; to be persuaded that God has intrusted you with your children, only to conduct them to him; a charge, which none are so properly able to execute, as yourselves.

For but observe, my friends, the natural sway you have over their untaught manners. As they live under your wings, and are conscious they depend on you for every necessary, they listen to you as their oracles; they respect you as their rulers; they fear you as their judges; they love you as their benefactors; they imitate you as their models; they follow you as their guides; in fine, they consider you as their masters and witnesses. How great then must be your influence, both on their minds and on their hearts? Of what utility must the good instructions be to them, which you give them in their infancy? No, says an ancient author; the native air is not so available to restore decaying health, as the instructions of parents to strike the roots of virtue into the minds of their growing offspring.

It is an incontestable obligation then, dear people, to give your children all the instruction in your power. But as many of you rather stand in need of this assistance yourselves, to fulfil the extent of this duty, you must send them to school, if in your power; or at least bring them to the chapel, which will cost you nothing. You have occasion for your children at home you say; an idle plea. Afford your little ones time for instruction, and there will still remain sufficient for any service, you can have a right to exact of them. Be more attentive to your real interests, the salvation of your progeny, and these difficulties will quickly vanish.

But, oh deplorable! People are but little solicitous for this point, for the spiritual welfare of their children; a gross insensibility, which, and with an aching heart I say it, will one day be the cause of the reprobation of innumerable parents. For in how many might I instance, who so far from forming their offspring to virtue, instruct them both
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by word and example, in every thing that is criminal? Inhuman Fathers! are you then the instruments of your childrens life only to be the occasions of their damnation?

But I will suppose, Christians, that you have nothing to reproach yourselves with on this head: that the indocility alone, and evil disposition of your pupils obstruct their profiting by the piety of your instructions. In this case, you must call in correction to your aid: you must punish them to amend their errors. But let it be done in that spirit in which God chastises his elect; i. e. because he loves them, and only means either to subdue their vices, or to add a lustre to their merits. In like manner, the punishments, you inflict upon your children, must proceed from affection, and from your desire to make them virtuous; and not from the suggestions of dislike, anger or passion; for such as are in a passion, says St. Chrysostom, are but ill qualified to direct others. On the contrary, parents, such a conduct can only tend to impress on them a bad opinion of you. You are obliged then to correct your children; but beware of doing it in anger; which so far from useful, would even be pernicious. Correction is a matter of precept; but let it be used for weighty faults solely, and not for trifles. Fathers and mothers! your obligations are great: discharge them faithfully: punish; but in so doing, avoid extremes; and in steering clear of severity, shun the still more fatal dangers of indulgence.

You know without doubt, brethren, how dearly the high priest Heli paid for not chastising his refractory sons, as recorded in the book of Kings. Learn from his example the obligation incumbent on you; and remember this obligation is not optional, but compulsory: You are commissioned by God himself to avenge the crimes, that may start up in your families; which, as soon as they appear, you are bound to set your face against and punish as they merit.

For in this point, parents do not hope to be excused. It depended solely on you to have checked the progress of those vices of your offspring, that now disgrace you. Howsoever vicious their disposition, it might have been tempered or repressed. Were they led astray by the violence of passion? you might have blunted its edge and weakened it. Was their ruin owing to inclination or opportunity? it would have been easy for you, with a little management, to have given their desires and thoughts a different turn. If the will is but sincere, every thing may be accomplished. Whence their misfortune then, but from the bad education you have given them, from your facility in pardoning them? If, while they grew up under the shelter of your wings, you had left nothing uncorrected; if you had followed up your commands by the idea, sometimes of punishment, sometimes of reward; if you had not seconded their inclinations through a censurable fondness, you would not have at present to lament those abuses, which it is no longer in your power to remedy. But, my dear friends, what should strike you with horror is the reflection, with which I will conclude; viz. that these same children, whom you have so culpably spared, will hereafter curse you for all eternity.

Alas!

Alas! will these unhappy victims say; we are not the authors of our dreadful fate; the cause is rather to be sought for in the cruel perfidy of our parents, or more justly parricides. Oh sacred justice! will the child exclaim from the midst of the fiery furnace; I complain not of thy severity; nor yet of thy malice, Oh infernal spirit! It is my father I arraign. He is the sole author of my sufferings; he the only cause of my damnation. He talked to me of nothing but the concerns of the world, never of God: All that he taught me was to swear, to blaspheme, to drink, to cheat. Was he ever solicitous where I went, what company I kept, whether I frequented my duties? Did he instruct me in my private prayers! Did he make me attend the public service? Barbarous and unnatural fathers! do you not hear them complain, amidst the flames that devour them, of your cruel indulgence? A thousand times curse the day that gave them birth, the day on which they began to sin? curse you yourselves, with the most horrid imprecations? Let the reflections, which now offer to your minds, parents, be so forcible, as to inspire you with the resolution of doing your utmost to avert such direful consequences: prevent them by a diligent attention to your children, and all their wants, both of body and soul; that the virtuous education, you now give them, may be the ground work of their salvation, and the ensurance of your own eternal happiness. Amen.

T H E

SECOND SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY.

ON MATRIMONY.

There was a marriage in Cana of Gallilee; and the mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus also was invited. John ii. 1.

FOR which reason this was doubtless a desirable union: But whence the cause of the numberless unhappy ones, we every where see? because Jesus was not invited to them. For it is an indubitable truth, that God is the sole author of holy marriages. *House and riches*, says Solomon, Prov. xix. 14. *are given by parents, but a prudent wife is properly from the Lord.* To obtain so great a blessing therefore, Christians, what is your principal duty? O you, who are not yet joined in the bonds of matrimony! do as they did at Cana: Invite Jesus to your wedding, solicit him to direct you in your future alliance, to sanctify it by his grace, to crown it with his benediction.

But are you engaged, without having consulted the will of God; and, in consequence thereof, does contention disunite those, whom love should make but one. Do not despair; the evil is not irremediable. To restore peace, harmony, and affection to your compact, imitate the conduct of the bride and bridegroom of Cana, and like them address yourselves to the mother of Jesus, to obtain an exertion of his power.

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This, my dear friends, is the surest way to rectify whatever there may have been faulty in the engagement, you have contracted. Were matters thus put into the hands of Jesus, we should soon see the husband love his wife, and the wife obedient to her husband, as St. Paul enjoins. Wherefore to draw a solid instruction from this gospel, I will here exhibit to you, first, what you have to do previously to entering into the married state; and secondly, what your obligations are when once embarked therein. These two reflections shall furnish matter for the discourse of this day; after supplicating his aid, who, on various occasions, so strongly patronized this holy institution.

It is a saying admitted as a truth, that happy matches are made in heaven; because as God alone knows us thoroughly, so he alone can point out the party, the most likely to lead us to himself. Wherefore the prayer of David was this; *Make the way known to me, O God! wherein I should walk.* Ps. cxlii. 8. But how are matters conducted in your engagements, Christians? The first fault you commit in them is, that you neglect to consult the Lord; the second, that inclination alone decides your choice; the third, that the end you propose, is often very remote from your sanctification: abuses, that I will endeavour to enable those to avoid, who are not yet linked in the sacred bonds of wedlock.

In the first place then, it is a great fault, in such as would engage in this state, to neglect to consult the will of God on the step, they mean to take. Hear how he explains himself by the mouth of the prophet *Isaias*: You have chosen *the things that displeased me*; lxxv. 12. You have entered into a state, to which I did not call you; you have sacrificed yourselves to carnal desires; I stretched out my hand to guide you, but you bade me to withdraw it. I will therefore number you by the point of my sword only; *You shall fall by slaughter*; the state of life you have embraced against my will, shall prove a source of malediction to you. And here, my friends, acknowledge the accomplishment of this menace: For whence springs the unhappiness, we behold so frequently in the married state? The neglect of consulting the will of heaven is cause sufficient. No: whilst in marrying, people pay no attention but to interest, and think of nothing less than invoking God, let them not expect to see an end to those disorders, that at once disgrace the Christian and Christianity.

For if religion dictates that we must implore the assistance of the Deity in every undertaking; how much more indispensable is this duty, when you are about to embrace a state for your whole lives, and a state fraught with difficulties and perils, as is that of matrimony; either from the pressure of a too numerous family, which you can scarce provide for; or from the loss of a child, the darling hopes of your old age; or from the suspicions and jealousies, that an inconsiderate word may give birth to in the mind of a husband or a wife? Do not these things demand a due consideration, and that, before you make any engagement, you have recourse to God in an affair, that may be attended with such pernicious consequences?

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But not only do you neglect to consult the Lord on this occasion; your views, moreover, are entirely earthly and human; your preparation for this sacrament is utterly different from that you use in respect to the others: as if matrimony was not instituted by Christ, or as if it did not presuppose the like dispositions of sanctity, as the other sacraments.

Nor tell me, Christians, that inclination alone must be your guide in marrying, although I am sensible there is an affection, founded on reason, which religion authorizes; but you are bound, I say, above all things, to consult heaven on the choice you are about to make: the motives for which the sacred penman suggests. A good wife, says Solomon, is the greatest of all blessings; she is the lot of those, who fear God, and shall be *given to a man for his good deeds*. Eccl. xxvii. 3. As on the other hand, a dissipated, passionate, worthless wife is, of all scourges, the most severe: better to live *with a lion and a dragon*, says the same oracle, *than with a wicked woman*. Ib. xxvi. 23. What the Holy Ghost here says of the wife, may be applied with equal reason to the husband; and if you will know my sentiments, with far greater: for the wife has not the authority the husband has; and although virtue might prove too feeble to restrain, yet other motives would always check her: But if the head of the family be cholerick, sottish, dissolute, what limits to his passions? Useless the lamentations of a virtuous wife; vain the tears of well disposed children; he will trample on them all in the pursuit of his vicious habits; nothing can stop, nothing can divert him. *Look not then*, the Holy Ghost concludes, *upon a woman's beauty*: For if that be her sole accomplishment, you will find it extremely difficult not to wed her vices with her person.

From the dangers then attending rash engagements, judge, dear people, how guilty those parents are, who marry their children without taking just precautions, or without paying a due attention to the will of God. Are you sure, ye greedy parents, you are not preparing some giddy, capricious female for the son, you love so tenderly? If they are not made for each other, have they not every reason to apprehend the issue? If it be certain that we may lose our souls in every state, let us allow this peril is in no condition of life so imminent as in the state of wedlock.

But if it must be acknowledged that the danger is extreme in those matches, in which the Lord is not consulted; let us also confess that peace and concord reign in such, as he presides at: lovely peace! delightful concord! you are the true riches, says St. Chrysostom, the solid happiness of matrimony. For it is a real blessing, says this Father, when the married couple go on cordially, hand in hand, and when they are both so united in affection as to make but one: An union, that cannot take place, but by the means of that sacred charity, *which is poured abroad in our hearts*; and this principally is what they must petition for, who design to enter into this state. For every affection, that is not founded on the principles of virtue, is but a rope of sand, which sooner or later, must fall to pieces: Whereas that love, which is derived from God, whatever difficulties occur, unites the man and wife more firmly,
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and procures them the graces necessary to bear in common a yoke, that is sufficient to overpower those, who take it up without this support.

Thus, my friends, whenever by the inspiration of heaven, or by the advice of those, who have authority over you, you shall have formed the resolution to enter into the state of matrimony, expect from God the party the most eligible for you ; i. e. trust that providence, which governs all things, will not fail to throw in your way the person, of whom you should make choice. For as it is the greatest happiness, both for time and eternity, to form a connection with one, that will lead us to virtue ; we may hope that the divine superintendence, which watches over the elect, will so dispose of all things, that regard them, as to conduct them to the destined term, by such ways, as it discovers to them, and prevails on them to take to.

But it is not sufficient, Christians, to consult the will of heaven on the state and choice in marrying. You must likewise be careful that the end, you therein aim at, be your sanctification. It is true that the end of marriage, at its first institution, was solely the multiplication of the human race : but after Adam's sin, it was meant as a remedy to concupiscence ; to which, in the new law, Christ superadded the grace of a sacrament, to render it more efficacious. But what a mean idea of the sacrament of matrimony, to suppose it only instituted as a remedy to an inordinate passion ? It is a remedy, I confess ; but its principal end is to raise up children to Jesus Christ. In marrying, therefore, you are not only to be actuated by the desire of finding a remedy to concupiscence ; but likewise by the wish of entering into the views of God ; which are to propagate his kingdom, and augment the number of heaven's inheritors.

From all this, my brethren, endeavour to collect such instructions, as may be serviceable. Adopt those sentiments, that made St. Paul say ; *Lord ! what wilt thou have me to do ?* Acts ix 6. Conjure him to manifest his will to you, and to favour you with the guidance of his angel, as he did Toby ; that you may take no imprudent step, either through the impulse of passion, or the allurements of interest. A holy end is not to be aspired at by criminal means ; unless you would experience, to your cost, the truth of that insinuation of the scripture ; that when the devil presides at a wedding, as he does at all such as are influenced solely by passion, he acquires a right to regulate it throughout. But, having informed of what you ought to do, and what to avoid, before marriage ; let me next endeavour to shew you the extent of the duties you contract, by embracing this holy state.

I say, then, Christians, with St. Paul ; matrimony is a great sacrament. Ephes. v. 32. But it is only so from its reference to Jesus Christ, our divine Saviour ; it is only so in the church, which is his spouse ; it is only so for the faithful, who are the members of his mystical body. But hence the source of many obligations, which the great apostle shall trace out to you. *Husbands love your wives.* Eph. v. 25. Here is the first obligation, which suggests the duties of the husband in regard to the wife. *Wives be subject to your husbands.* Col. iii. 18. Here the second obligation, which dictates the duties of the wife, in regard to her husband.

husband. *Bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord* ; Eph. vi. 4 Here a third obligation, which regulates their joint duties in respect to their children. A little attention will make you sensible of the nature of these threefold obligations.

Husbands, love your wives : but in what manner ? *as Christ loved the church*, St. Paul continues. What do you say to this, ye daring violators of a faith, pledged in the awful presence of the sacred altar ? Christ loved his church, and having loved it once, did he afterwards forget it ? did he slight it ; did he transfer his affection and love elsewhere ? Can there then be those among you, Christians, who dare to fly in the face of this command ? what ! did you inveigle your wives from their families, only to sacrifice them to your passions, to plunge them into an ocean of grief, to feed them with the bread of sorrow ? But, ye christian wives ! if you have a right to the respect and affection of your consorts, they have a similar demand on you ; your obligations are reciprocal ; and without pretending to justify the unwarrantable conduct of a licentious husband, I make bold to tell you that, if you be wanting in fidelity, your injustice is the more flagrant of the two ; since to violate the rights of this sacred faith is, in your regard, not only to sin ; but also to involve yourselves in a train of sins, that you may never have the power to remedy.

All you then, that are united by the ties of matrimony, love one another ; but let it be with that rational love, which banishes all passion, and which is kept alive by condescension and mutual communication of thoughts and sentiments. For though submission, brethren, be the duty of your wives, they are not to be made to feel the weight of despotism. But what is the case frequently ? harsh words, invectives, reproaches, threats, nay ! even blows are sometimes scarcely thought too much. Ye savage husbands ! is it thus your Saviour loved his church ?

To this rational, add a pure love ; i. e. a love, which tends equally to your mutual sanctification. In this regard chiefly, husbands, you must use that authority, the apostle gives you. You cannot love your partners as Christ loved his church, unless you endeavour to make them holy and perfect. How pleasing would it be to see an emulation between man and wife ; an emulation, I say, not of injurious words, nor of animosity and anger ; but of charity and zeal, of piety and good works. We then should have no longer to bewail those disputes, which beginning with the one, and kept alive by the other, seem to become invincible, through the obstinacy of both parties ; insomuch that we might be tempted to think they had mutually agreed to lead each other to the gates of ruin.

In fine, *husbands love your wives* ; but in a like manner as Christ does his church, with a durable and constant affection. As Christ will continue to love his church to the end of time ; so neither must the affection between you end, but with life : nay, it must even reach beyond the grave. Away then with discord and dissensions. No longer give the world cause to judge ill of you. For be assured that, whenever you disagree, the consequence will be that one, or both of you must suffer in the estimation of the public.

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But if the apostle commands husbands to love their wives, he expresses in clear terms in what manner wives must obey their husbands. *As the church, he says is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their husbands, IN ALL THINGS*; Eph. v. For the man is the head of the wife, as Christ of the church. Ye wives! weigh attentively these words, *in all things*. This sole expression may suffice to do away every pretext, to clear up every doubt, that may arise: *in all things*, nothing but sin excepted; for it never was the intention of St. Paul to teach that wives must be obedient in such things, as offend God.

And if you want an example for your imitation, cast your eyes on the most holy of all creatures. If any one could have a claim to be exempted from obedience, it surely was Mary. In point of privilege and dignity, there was nothing superior to her on earth. But how expressly notwithstanding does heaven declare in favour of her spouse? Is it necessary to remove out of the reach of Herod's cruelty, to go into Egypt, and to return? Joseph is charged with the orders, Joseph announces, Joseph executes them: and Mary, without alleging the plea of her rank, submits to them implicitly. And why? because she enters into the intentions of the Deity, and deems it her duty not to resist a power, which he establishes and upholds so visibly.

But if, despairing to attain to the perfection of Mary, her example makes but a faint impression on you, turn your eyes to a woman like yourselves, and who had every thing to dread from the brutality of her partner; I mean St. Monica. How ill it becomes us, she said to some of her sex, who were complaining of their husbands in her presence; how ill it becomes us, to forget what we are? it was in our power not to have engaged ourselves: but when once we are disposed of to a superior, it is the part of prudence to remember we are no longer our own mistresses, but that the will of another must be our rule.

I do not tell you, married women! that you may not, nor even that you ought not to remonstrate with your spouses, if they command any thing unlawful; by making them sensible that God must be obeyed in the first place: but let your remonstrances be accompanied with that amiable sweetness, with which St. Monica tempered her representations, and seemed to yield, when she saw her husband's passion rising. This, I confess, may appear harsh to an imperious and lofty spirit; but yet it is indispensable to a christian heart, to a heart conscious of the obligations of its state. Obey then, ye wives, and let it be with promptitude and cheerfulness; this will lighten the yoke: nor let any thing ever tempt you to shake it off. Isaac had lost his sight, and was bent under the iron hand of age; but Rebecca did not lay aside her deference; and as long as it pleased the Lord to spare her consort's life, so long did she retain the respectful sentiments she owed to him.

Finally, the third duty, the apostle enjoins to married people, and which is common to them both, is to educate their children, to instruct and to correct them. It is not enough for parents to have given existence to their offspring, they must support that existence: nor is this sufficient, they must provide for them: nor does it suffice to provide for them, as to this world: they must educate and train them up to piety;
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heads, that I have already sufficiently enlarged upon in my instruction on this subject. As to the two first points, nature and ambition prompt you to them in general : nay, you are even solicitous to improve such budding talents as your children manifest : but the part you too often shamefully neglect, is to bestow a christian education on them ; a matter notwithstanding, that parents must be peculiarly responsible for to God.

But never forget what I now tell you ; to labour at the sanctification of your offspring is, without dispute, your *most important*, not to style it your *only concern* in life. It is your province to conduct your children to God ; by bringing them up in his holy fear, by correcting their bad inclinations, and by giving them an early bent to virtue : above all, it is your part to hold up good example to them, neither saying nor doing any thing in their presence, that may be a subject of scandal to souls susceptible of every impression.

How many among you, are there, brethren, who perhaps are guilty of the bad courses their pupils have taken to, and who have no where to lay the blame, but on the bad example which they gave them in their youth ? Your actions, parents, are as so many torrents to them, that bear them down irresistibly, in spite of whatever good dispositions they may inherit from nature. What probability is there that a girl, brought up by a mother, who makes no scruple to neglect her devotions ; who spends her time in dressing ; who asperses her neighbour's character without ceremony ; what probability, I say, that a girl, thus tutored, will be more pious, more modest, more charitable than her mother ? What appearance that a son, under the conduct of a drunken, swearing, dissolute father, will not become a drunkard, a blasphemer, a libertine like him ? What prospect, in fine, that children, improperly educated, will reform, when they themselves become masters of families ? Men generally retain the inclinations and habits they first imbibed ; and great efforts are requisite to make them alter, in a more advanced period, the good or bad impressions of their tender years.

From what has been said, my dear friends, do not conclude that I design to inspire you with an aversion to the state of matrimony ; God forbid I should, whose institution it originally is, and which nothing but the extreme depravity of the times, could possibly have stigmatized ; all I have said is only meant to make you sensible with what precaution you ought to act, before you engage yourselves ; and to impress on you a conviction of the indispensable obligations, this sacred contract brings with it. Entreat God, therefore, Christians, to assist you ; either by enabling you to retrieve any false step you may have taken ; or by infusing into you a zealous ardour in the discharge of your christian duties. If you be already bound by this indissoluble tie, beseech him so to unite your hearts by the bonds of charity, that after serving him with unanimity in this life, you may possess him together in the next. Amen.

T H E

THIRD SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY.

O N F A I T H.

I have not found so great faith in Israel. Matt. viii. 10.

OF the two instances of humility and faith, proposed to us in the gospel of this day, Christians, it is difficult to decide which is the most deserving of our attention. But since our Redeemer was pleased to express his approbation of this centurion, we will take our present lesson from him, whose faith Christ himself held up as a model of instruction.

Do we desire then to obtain any favour of the divine bounty? let us imitate the humility, and more especially the faith of this heathen officer, whose profession makes his virtues more conspicuous. His faith is so strong, that he believes in Christ, from what he hears concerning him: it is so meritorious, as to procure, besides the highest commendations, the instant grant of his petition.

From this, dear people, what shall we infer? that if the Lord exerts himself so little in our behalf, it is because our faith in him is weak. Here is the source of our misfortune. Let us blush at our want of faith; or rather at the want of conformity between our faith and morals. To obviate which, my present intention is to persuade you to adapt your conduct to your belief. And to succeed in my design, I will, first, exhibit to you the reasons why you should submit to faith; and secondly, will examine the qualities essential to a true belief: addressing myself with you, for this purpose, to the author of our faith, Christ Jesus, our sovereign light.

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Were we but sensible of the excellence of faith, we should not hesitate to captivate our understanding to its yoke, and to present it with the homage of our submission: a submission, which is founded on duty, on necessity, and on interest. For this submission I say, is *just*; it is *necessary*; it is *advantageous*; as I will evince to you in order.

Nothing then, my dear friends, is more *just*, than to submit to faith. It is an homage we owe to the Deity on many titles. In vain to strip ourselves of our possessions, if we refuse to give up the command of our understanding: In vain to keep our will in captivity, if the judgment be allowed to erect itself in opposition to the sovereign truth, the object of our faith. In vain to renounce our liberty, if we avail ourselves of our reason, to repair the loss. "This servitude, says St. Chrysostom, which becomes us as rational beings, binds every Christian, and extends itself over all the faculties of his mind." Every day, people sacrifice their inclinations to a friend; their repose to a paltry interest; their lives to their king and country. But Christ alone demands the sacrifice of the understanding. For what respect do you shew to God, Christians, if you only then give him credit, when the light of reason attests the evidence of his words? Do you not every day shew as much to those, with whom you converse? Or if you think you injure them, by calling for the proofs of what they advance; how great an affront must you offer to the Supreme Being, when you require to be convinced of such truths as he discloses, before you will assent to him.

But you will ask me perhaps in what this submission of the understanding consists. In believing humbly and firmly, through faith, whatever God has sufficiently made known, by revelation; whatever he teaches by his church. A submission so much the more equitable, as the Lord, being both omniscient and steady, can neither be deceived himself, nor have a wish to deceive us: he is the essence of truth: what more just than to assent to what is founded on truth itself? Can we desire any further evidence? or rather shall we not say with Cassian, "God has assumed it; his word is authority enough?"

I acknowledge, Christians, it must be a trial to believe what we do not see, what we cannot conceive, nor comprehend by the light of reason. But, at the same time, the obscurity of faith ought not to diminish our obedience: and why? because it is the word of God. Without this motive there is no faith; and without such an obscurity this motive falls to the ground. For your own good sense shall decide: did the Deity propose to us to believe only what we experience; for instance, that fire is endued with the power of burning, &c. we should then believe, not on the authority of his command, but on the conviction of our senses. But when our eyes see nothing; when our reason is in the dark; we submit to the word of God: we bring our understanding into captivity, as St. Paul terms it; and glorify the Lord; not so much as he merits indeed, but as much however as we can, and ought.

I say *as much as we can, and ought*. For what is it to believe obsequiously? It is, according to St. Chrysostom, to sacrifice every thing to faith; to make this the rule of our conduct, the mistress of our thoughts: it is to disavow our senses; to suspend our own lights; to confess our ignorance: in fine, it is to do homage to the authority of the

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Sovereign Being, by the most unlimited and universal dependence. Such, my brethren, is the sacrifice that faith requires of us ; a sacrifice no less *necessary* than *equitable*.

Nor presume I go too far, in saying it is absolutely *necessary* to sacrifice reason, however enlightened it may be, to the respectful light of faith. For if it be certain that reason is not competent to guide us in matters of religion, the necessity of submitting implicitly to faith is obvious. Now reason is not equal to the task, I say ; because every rule of faith must be *infallible*, *firm*, and *universal* ; none of which advantages is reason in possession of.

First, reason is not *infallible* ; because it is liable to err, as the experience of each day evinces. Secondly, neither is it a *firm* rule, and such as may be depended on ; for every one has not the same ideas, nor do we all behold objects through the same medium. Ask advice, consult the most able teachers ; one will point out this way, another that ; and which to adhere to, amidst such a variety of opinions ? Can reason conciliate so many jarring sentiments, which originate principally in itself ? Now if reason, in matters of faith, be neither an *infallible*, nor a *sure* rule ; it is still much less an *universal* one ; and the only evidence I desire in this respect is your own experience. To dive into truths so sublime, and at the same time so obscure, as those proposed to us by faith, would doubtless require profound study and deep consideration, much labour and much time. Now this, you know you are incapable of ; and few amongst you are thoroughly instructed in the principles of religion. Nevertheless, faith appertains to all. It is for the ignorant as for the learned : for you, my friends, in your obscurity, as for the great ones in their splendor. Let us then infer securely, that if reason, with all its helps, never was, nor can be sufficiently perfect to answer the purpose of directing us ; faith alone is that *infallible*, that *firm*, that *universal* guide we look for.

Faith then, I say, first, is an *infallible* rule : for we assent, because the Lord has spoken by his prophets, by his apostles, by himself. Now if we daily believe a thousand extraordinary events, on the testimony of history ; why should we not allow the like credit to the word of God ? Why should we call in question mysteries, that have been warranted by the whole body of inspired writers ; by the tradition of all ages ; by the accomplishment of so many prophecies ; by the blood of so many martyrs ; by innumerable supernatural cures ; by the unanimous consent of so many different nations ? And if, like St. Paul, we do not comprehend what we believe, at least we may say with him ; we know the unerring authority on which we stand : *I know on whom I have believed* ; 2 Tim. i. 12. But my faith, which is *infallible*, is also *firm* and *steady*. However little we may have the misfortune to go astray, we risk its utter loss. The Supreme Being has vouchsafed to submit the whole system of nature to man's researches : but let faith be ever so lightly interested therein, reason must yield : The learned, as well as the ignorant, must bow to the yoke of that faith, which besides being *infallible* and *firm*, is likewise *universal*. For which reason the apostle of the gentiles owns himself a debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise. For as with God there is no exception

of persons, and his bounty holds out salvation to each one; this sacred light of faith pierces no less into the cottages of the poor, than into the palaces of kings. It sheds its rays upon the rudest, as well as the most polished nations. For by her we are all instructed in the end, we ought to seek, and the means to arrive at it.

But what must complete your conviction on this head, Christians, is the subsequent remark. We have but four ways of acquiring knowledge; faith, reason, our senses, and the beatific vision. Now in the first place, the Lord does not vouchsafe to grant us this happy vision here. Secondly, our senses discover to us material and sensible objects only; whereas the truths of religion are spiritual and invisible. Nothing then remains but reason, and faith: the former, as you have seen, is too uncertain, too variable, too limited: of consequence, we must have recourse to the latter, and pay it that respectful obedience, which besides being *just* and *necessary*, is moreover highly *to our advantage*.

Nothing more weak than the human understanding. Every difficulty checks its progress; the most ordinary works of nature elude its comprehension. Now, if its reach be so contracted in the smallest things, how shall it explore the judgments of the Deity, which are incomprehensible? how shall it fathom his designs, which are inscrutable? But what man cannot effect by reason alone, he accomplishes by the help of faith. In vain does he endeavour to account, by reason, for the various events he daily sees: how, for instance, the wicked prosper and are glutted with riches; whilst indigence and misery are the portion of the virtuous. He is at a loss to discover the equity of his God, when he beholds injustice rewarded, pride crowned, vice triumphant. But that, which shocks him, when he consults his reason only, is his consolation when he listens to faith. Directed by this sacred information, he knows that the afflictions of the just are advantageous to them; that *they who sow in tears, shall reap in joy*, Ps. cxxv. 5. He is sensible that the prosperity of the impious, whose grandeur dazzles us, is often subservient to the views of Heaven: that the Neroes, the Dioclesians, and other persecutors of the Christian name, contributed to the establishment of religion, at the very time they thought themselves sapping its foundation.

In attending to reason only, man may be disposed to frame doubts, either on the subject of a future state, or on the immortality of his soul. But faith removes all such injurious suspicions. It discovers to him eternity, as the end to which he should aspire: It assures him that a temporary life cannot terminate the views of a soul, made by the Lord himself, on the model of his own image.

Admirable faith! my brethren, which roots us in the knowledge of things otherwise the most unintelligible. The more incredible the object proposed, the more firmly it assents to it. The less it comprehends that three distinct persons can make one and the same God; that he, who is impassible and immortal, should have subjected himself to sufferings and to death: that Christ reigning in heaven, should be truly present in the adorable sacrament of the Eucharist: the less, I say, it comprehends

comprehends these prodigies, with the greater submission and humility does it bow to them.

In concluding this part of my discourse, I leave yourselves, dear Christians, to decide what acknowledgments we owe to the Divinity, for imparting to us the rich gift of his faith, this greatest of all his blessings. Yes, O God! we are indebted to thee for it; and without it what should we have been? What, at this day, are so many infidel and heathen nations? Complete, O Lord! what thou hast begun, and help us to profit by the talent, which thou hast put into our hands. But to favour you with this grace, brethren, God requires that your faith be vested with such qualities, as may make it meritorious.

To believe is something, but not sufficient. Besides believing interiorly, we must manifest our faith exteriorly, by the practice of good works. To effect which, Christians, our faith must be both active and permanent. Let us now examine if your faith bears these two marks.

It is a truth, authenticated by the sacred writings, that faith is of no service, unless accompanied with works. *What will it profit if a man says that he hath faith, but hath not works: shall faith be able to save him; says St. James: ii. 14. Faith, he repeats, without works is dead. Ib. 26.*

According to the advice of St. Paul then *prove yourselves and try*, if you have faith. Have you that lively faith, which spurs on your natural propensity to indolence; that humble faith, which nothing can disgust? that obedient faith, which nothing can shock? that universal faith, which recoils at nothing? which receives, which embraces whatever it is taught?

Your faith enjoins you to avoid quarrels, jealousies, animosities, &c. *prove yourselves*, and see if you be guarded against these vices. Your faith commands you to be punctual in your devotions, just in regard to your neighbour, and not to injure him, either in his property or character; *prove yourselves*. Faith orders you to love your wives, and train up your children to piety: Do you not frequently abuse the one, and scandalize the other, by your oaths and passion? Can you then flatter yourselves that you have faith? Truly Christians, had faith any influence over you, would you be seen to profane it in those places of debauchery, where every vice stalks in triumph? public houses I mean; where the demon of gluttony, the demon of lust, the demon of discord; in short, where all the infernal spirits hold their court, and command with such authority. What says your conscience at this moment? Can it, without imposing on you, bear testimony that you have faith, and practise its works?

Am I not then founded, brethren, in asserting that you resemble those bad Christians, of whom St. Paul speaks; who make profession of knowing the Deity, but deny him in their works? You say you believe in God, and all the mysteries of your religion: I am willing to allow it. But why do your actions belie your words? Why do not your lives keep pace with your professions? You believe there is a God; and you do not obey him. You believe this God is every where, and
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sees all things ; yet you often do in his presence, what you would blush to do before those, with whom you live. You believe a general judgment ; and you fear not to appear at it : a hell ; and you do not dread it. You believe Jesus Christ to be truly present in the Eucharist ; and you enter his house without respect, without reverence. No, my friends, no : You do not believe these things ; or if you do, it is only by a sterile and speculative faith, which can but serve to aggravate your guilt, and is the most undeniable testimony of your folly. For if it be a notorious hardness, says a great man, not to believe the gospel, though sealed with the blood of such a host of martyrs, let us confess it to be the height of inconsistency to say we give firm credit to the gospel, and yet live as if we deemed it a mere fiction.

And what is the result, but that you hazard the entire loss of your belief ? For not to mention that reason dictates that a faith, which lays open to innumerable attacks, must quickly fall ; the great St. Gregory asserts that, in punishment of a licentious life, men are frequently brought, by a just, but tremendous judgment of heaven, to the fatal pass of becoming actually unbelievers, and of no longer admitting those salutary truths, for which they boasted themselves ready to give their lives.

Let us then dread, my brethren, the loss of this most precious and heaven-sent gift ; this sacred deposit, that has been transmitted to us with so much cost. Let us fear, says St. Augustine, lest, at the tribunal of the Lord, this faith, which should have been the cause of our sanctification, should rise up against us, and demand vengeance for our sacrilegious abuse of it. Oh ! let us prevent that rigorous accusation, which will then be the matter of our despair. Let us believe ; but let us likewise act. Let a pious and holy life, a life crowned with works, attest the sincerity of our faith ; and let us not pervert the greatest, the most valuable, the most noble of all blessings into a source of confusion and eternal woe. But that our belief be active and accompanied with good works will not suffice ; it must moreover be durable, permanent, and actuated by charity.

The most effectual support of faith, dear people, is the practice of good works, as I have already said. Let us adhere firmly to its principles with those, who go from virtue to virtue ; and with them we shall be conducted from light to light. Let our piety in the exercises of religion be constant : our vigilance over our senses and passions uninterrupted : our attachment to the duties of our state inviolable : our attention to relieve distress adequate to our abilities : our zeal to correct and instruct those, committed to us, exemplary. But to our persistence alone in these virtues, is the crown of glory promised. Who are they, that in the Apocalypse approach the nearest to the throne of the Lamb ? those, who, having been tried by him, had followed him with constancy. On earth even, it is not precisely faith ; but a lively faith, a faith supported by the incessant practice of the most heroic virtues, that the Lord looks down on with complacency : this is the grand secret, by which those distinguished characters, mentioned by
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the apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews, raised themselves so high in his estimation.

But alas! brethren; the faith of many of you, I fear is but a timid, wavering faith; and was I to draw a comparison between your conduct, and that of those unfortunate nations, who have not had the advantage of being enlightened like you, would it not turn to your confusion? For, Christians, and it is for your benefit I speak; to compare the morals of the infidels, their desires, their manners with yours, where is the difference? Are you more disengaged from the things of the earth than the idolatrous heathen? Are you less enslaved to your passions? less addicted to intemperance, lewdness, &c.? less sensible of injuries; less alive to resentment? And what will it profit you to bear the glorious name of Christians, if you live like infidels? What will it avail you to believe, if your actions contradict your faith? Shall that, which, according to God's designs, should be the principle of our salvation, become by our abuse, the immediate cause of our reprobation? For, once more; to be rewarded, it will not suffice to believe. However blind your submission to the truths of faith may be, unless you do your utmost to live up to them with perseverance, and to reach the goal of justice, says St. Paul, never promise yourselves the crown. Christ requires that his disciples be obedient; and no others will he introduce into his kingdom, but such as, observant of his word, shall have followed the maxims he has taught, and uniformly practised the virtues, which he himself has set the first example of. Make what enquiries you will, Christians; there is no other way of coming to him. We must *believe*; this is the commencement of our justification: We must believe, and *act accordingly*; this its consummation. To believe then is not enough; *to believe and act* is the whole law and the prophets. Without this, faith will only tend to our condemnation. The unprofitable servant, whose faith indolence shall have rendered useless, shall be cast, bound hand and foot, into exterior darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Oh such of you, my friends, as have hitherto been practically incredulous! tremble at the idea of this sentence. And to evade it, collect from the apostle such instructions, as include your whole duty. Educated in the true belief, be resolute in adhering to it; let neither fear, nor any human consideration divide you from it; *stand fast in the faith*, 1 Cor. xvi. 13. Deaf to the voice of your passions, obey intrepidly the commands of this belief; *do manfully*. Let divine charity animate your actions as much as possible; *let all your things be done in charity*. 1 Cor. xvi. 14. In a word, fulfil the duties of faith; and remember that to begin well, to live well, and to believe aright, will be all to little purpose, unless fidelity and perseverance crown these virtues; *he that persevereth to the end shall be saved*. Matt. x. 22.

Finally, let us spare nothing to deserve hereafter to have those consoling words addressed to us; *thy faith hath made thee whole*, and saved thee. Mark x. 52. Thus that faith, which, during life, had been the motive of our hope, shall, after our death, be for all eternity the subject of our happiness. Amen.

T H E

FOURTH SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY.

O N T E M P T A T I O N S.

Lord ! save us, we perish. Matt. viii. 25.

THE behaviour of the apostles, in the emergency here related, is a model for our deportment in the time of temptation. The sea ran so high, that their bark was covered with the waves; in which distress they have a recourse to Christ, who was asleep; they awake him, and implore his help in these pathetic words, *Lord ! save us, we perish.*

If you have forgot your faith, says St. Augustine, if you have lost sight of the commandments of your God, Jesus Christ is asleep within you. Dread a storm at such a crisis, and on its approach do at least all you are able; apply to your Saviour, and rouse your faith.

It ought to be a great comfort to such, as are tempted, to be assured that Jesus Christ is always with them, to moderate their temptations in such a manner that, provided they but excite their faith, so far from having any thing to apprehend from their trials, they will reap great advantages from them, as St. Augustine concludes.

This being settled; before I unfold what I have to say on this subject, I would have you to observe, Christians, that there are two sorts of temptations; the one deliberate; i. e. such as we wilfully expose ourselves to: the other involuntary; i. e. such as our condition and weakness involve us in of necessity. Whence I shall confine myself to two reflections, no less natural than instructive: First, as to those

those temptations, to which God does not call you, fly: flight is your sole defence. Secondly, as to those, to which he does call you, fight: fighting alone can ensure you the victory. Spirit of light! dispel our darkness, that we may reap the fruit, here proffered to us, in the display of thy sacred truths.

What, ye sinners! do you trust to, when you wilfully expose yourselves? Or what is the foundation of your rashness? First, it is God: there is no temptation, you say, which you cannot overcome, when assisted by his grace. Secondly, it is yourselves: to-day exaggerating your strength, to-morrow your weakness: to-day you can conquer with ease, you think; to-morrow you must fall. The investigation of this matter will convince you that in such trials, as the Deity does not lay us open to, it is temerity to depend either on grace or on ourselves.

There is no temptation then, you say, you cannot conquer by the aid of God. I allow it. His grace is our support under those trials, which the ordinance of his Providence lays upon us; and although on such occasions, there be ground for apprehension, the fidelity of the Lord, ever true to his promises, is engaged not to suffer us to fall. Thus did grace keep Abraham firm, amidst the errors of idolatry; Lot, in the centre of Sodom; and Daniel at the very court. And what was the reason of it, Christians? but because these great men were placed in those critical situations by the hand of God himself; and that, in such circumstances, he would be wanting to himself, if I may so speak, was he to abandon us. Peter, at the voice of a servant maid, denies his master, in a place to which he was not called; and the same Peter is immovable, when cited before tyrants, by the divine command, to bear testimony to his name. These then solely are the persons, that can rely on grace in the time of temptation; such, I mean, as are exposed to it by the command of heaven, by the will of God, and according to the law of his sacred providence.

This principle laid down, my friends, do you not read your condemnation in it? What right, I ask, have you to that grace? on which you place such an unlimited dependence? Is it by the order of heaven you run into those mixed companies, where your virtue has so frequently suffered shipwreck? Is it by the order of heaven you frequent those seminaries of vice, where the loss of reason has been so often followed by the loss of honour? Is it by the order of heaven you form connections with men, void both of principles and morals? Certainly, it is not for God's sake that you expose yourselves to a multiplicity of such trials, as would baffle the most solid virtue, though grace will support you, you say. What! do you think it will become an accomplice in your crimes? Shall this grace, which the Antonies, the Hilarions, the Pauls were not sure to find in the most retired solitude, and in the practice of the rudest penance, shall it infallibly come to your assistance, amidst the occasions of sin you search after?

On the contrary, dear Christians, have you not reason to fear that the Lord, who created you to love and serve him; that this Lord, who

who is so jealous of the hearts of his creatures, should refuse his grace to you sooner than to others, in punishment of your ingratitude and temerity? That they in favour of whom, it seems, he has discovered less attention, should offend him without ceasing, is more supportable: but for you, whom he has particularly called to his knowledge, who are his children, the price of his blood, the tender objects of his mercy, thus to slight him, and expose yourselves deliberately to insult him, is, on your side, the deepest ingratitude, and on his, the most glaring affront.

But what are the pretences, which thus embolden you to look temptation in the face! You take them, first, from your strength; I am able to resist, you say. Secondly, from conscience; I would not sin wilfully. Thirdly, from the smallness of the danger; the occasion is remote. Fourthly, from your ignorance; I have not tried it. Fifthly, from experience itself; I have perceived nothing of it. Sixthly, in fine, if you have been so unfortunate as to fall, you figure to yourselves the impossibility of rising again. A brief elucidation will shew how futile all these pretences are.

And first, dear brethren, to be authorized to run yourselves into the dangers of temptation, you allege your strength. I might tell you that this presumptuous confidence of your own virtue, is in itself a great weakness, and a very just reason for the God of vengeance to forsake you. I might tell you that the boldest hearts have their timid moments. But no; I ask you, who boast so much of your courage; do the gross and mortal slips, at which you still perhaps blush, hold this language to you? No; the force of a Christian consists in his diffidence. He is then the most weak, when he thinks himself the strongest. When Sampson, big with the confidence of his own strength, dares to face the greatest peril, he says in his mind, *I will go out*; but at that very time *the Lord was departed from him*. Judges xvi. 20.

You cite conscience in the second place, and tell us you would not sin willingly. But, Christians, candidly; what reliance is to be placed, I pray, on that conscience, which, as you know, has often been but a weak defence against the greatest crimes? Believe me; conscience does not behold with an indifferent eye a danger, which the heart affects; opportunity soon pacifies its qualms. David in his palace would not sin; his conscience checks him; but the sight of the object inflames him, and the convenience presenting itself, the crime quickly ensues.

But what encourages you, you say again, is that the occasion is at a great distance. Alas! my friends, how imperfectly then do you know yourselves? With those easy dispositions you possess, that pliant heart, that propensity to evil, every thing is dangerous, immediately, in a sovereign degree dangerous. Oh! how I fear for the man, says St Chrysostom, that does not fear for himself? Every contagious breath of air affrights you, and each one strives to avoid it as much as possible. How much more to your welfare would it be to apprehend the peril of sin, and keep at a distance from it? for of all evils this is the most infectious, and the most easy to be taken in.

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But we have had no experience on such or such an occasion ; we must absolutely try it : what an illusion ? Hitherto, your experiments, Christians, have been so unfortunate, that you cannot hazard yourselves again with any safety. May we not judge of the future by the past ? how I dread lest another rock be a cause of ruin to you ? If you must make experiments, dear people, make them on matters of religion ; on divine love, on the forgiveness of injuries, on sobriety, &c. make them on christian virtues, and not on vice. Salvation and an eternity of happiness are often the price of such rash and dangerous trials !

But at least we have proofs before us, you say, that this or that temptation was not pernicious to us ; that in such a company, into which we intruded without precaution, we felt nothing. Frequently we are insensible, because we are dead ; we think we come away innocent, because we were guilty when we entered. Tell us then again that you felt nothing. You felt nothing ! To talk thus is to say you are possessed of hearts of a peculiar mould ; that you are invulnerable ; that you can live in the fire, without burning, and can walk on the brink of the precipice, without risk ; that you are superior to so many illustrious saints, and that God preserves your virtue, by the very means, the most likely to destroy it. However, to take away every pretext from your unwarranted presumption, I will admit that you may have remained unhurt in the midst of perils ; but *to the praise of God's grace*, as St. Paul says, does it redound, and not to your merit.

In fine, the last pretence you offer, and which, I dare to affirm, is the least admissible, is, that after magnifying your strength, if unhappily you yield, you then exaggerate your weakness : I cannot withdraw myself from this temptation ; I cannot overcome those rooted habits. This is what you sometimes say, Christians ; but I tell you that, in speaking thus, you lie to the Holy Ghost. For what do you not do to avail yourselves of a neighbour's misfortune, and procure his business ? Entreaties, recommendations, artifices are employed, and every imaginable spring is put in play. You can make sacrifices then to your fortune, though you cannot to your salvation. But is it not a shame, that the prospect of a vile interest should have more influence than the sacred rights of religion ; and that devoted, as we are, to the world, we should be so indifferent to our God ? In such temptations therefore, as our Maker does not call us to, it is our duty to fly, you see : let us next examine the obligation, under which we lie, of combating with those trials, that his providence ordains for us.

I shall not here attempt to shew you, dear people, what those temptations are, to which God calls us : I rather choose to lay before you the means resisting them, which I reduce to three ; watchfulness, prayer, and mortification. The proper use of these three means may encourage us to hope to rise superior to all the evil solicitations, that may assail us by the permission of the Deity.

A principal part of the watchfulness required of every Christian, and I may add the most important, is to be prepared to sustain all hostile attacks.

tasks. I find nothing more strongly inculcated in the sacred writings than this solicitude to be beforehand with temptations : *Son*, says the wise man, *prepare thy soul for temptation* : Ecclus. ii. 1. *Take the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day*, says the great Apostle ; Ephes. vi. 13. *Be sober and watch*, adds St. Peter : 1 Pet. v. 8. and why ? but because the spiritual warfare has its rules, as well as the temporal : and as it would be an inexcusable rashness in a soldier to go to battle, without being prepared by the knowledge of the usual discipline ; so it would be an unpardonable presumption in a Christian to enter the lists with the devil, without the dispositions necessary to maintain so unequal a combat.

And what I here advance, my brethren, is not a counsel of my own ; it is an obligation dictated by religion. We must watch, in order to defend ourselves against the assaults of our enemies, both visible and invisible. And what a host of them have we not to contend with ? The flesh, that domestic enemy : so much the more dangerous, as we are the less apprehensive of, as we love, as we flatter it ; what deadly wounds does it not inflict, if we be not hourly on our guard ? In league with our external foes, it betrays the gates of our hearts to them, through the avenues of our senses, unless prevented by a constant vigilance : the world, which seduces us by its maxims, which amuses us by its promises, which corrupts us by its manners : in fine, the devil, that potent, and artful enemy, who lays a thousand snares for us. Should we be less watchful for our safety, than he is for our ruin ? how then does it happen, Christians, that while this tempter is in continual motion to destroy us, we remain in a deplorable inaction, with respect to our salvation ?

Nothing however is more recommended by our Saviour, than this watchfulness. *Watch*, he says to his disciples ; watch assiduously : be always on your guard : act as if your enemies were at all times plotting your destruction ; or as if your master had a mind to put your fidelity to the proof : you know not when he will come, whether in the morning or in the evening : for which reason be always watchful : Yes, my apostles, I recommend to you, and in you, to all mankind, to watch at all times. Could Christ have notified his will more clearly on this head ?

But this christian vigilance must be accompanied with prayer. Prayer draws down the assistance of heaven, which we want in fighting ; and vigilance empowers us to make use of this assistance to advantage.

The life of a Christian is a continued scene of war ; and the discharge of these two duties must divide his whole attention.

And here, my friends, let us make a reflection, that may be highly beneficial, if we allow it its due weight. What was it led such crowds into the deserts ? was it not the indispensable obligation, incumbent on all the faithful, of watching and praying without ceasing ? Had these great men, these fathers of christianity, more passions to subdue, more dangers to avoid, more enemies to struggle with than we ? Alas ! the generality of them had fewer. How constant, notwithstanding, was their assiduity in praying and in watching ? and how defective

defective in ours ? They lived in deserts, remote from the contagion of the world : we in the centre of corruption, exposed defenceless to innumerable perils. There we behold spotless souls of every age, of every condition, of each sex, perpetually on their guard, and still apprehensive of a surprize : whilst we, Christians, already half subdued, go on unsuspecting and fearless ; at the mercy of a crafty foe, who is *seeking* constantly to *devour us*. Compare your conduct with theirs, and reconcile, if you can, your security with their circumspection, your indolence with their solicitude, your heedless indifference with their vigilant anxiety.

For the rest, dear people, learn that prayer is useless, if not supported by that christian watchfulness, which instructs us to avoid occasions. This appeared evidently in the fall of Peter. Never was there a man better disposed to espouse his master's cause : thrice did he assert his resolution of being eternally faithful ; even, the grace of prayer was not wanting ; nay, the prayer of the Son of God himself, who worked as many miracles, as he sent up vows to heaven ; *Simon, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.* Luke xxii. 32. What more could be desired ? Yet Peter, relying on himself, meets the danger ; he consults not his own weakness ; he does not enquire whether or no the spirit of God conducts him ; in short, he fails in a prudent vigilance, which would have preserved him from the risk, and he falls into that enormous crime, that should be an everlasting warning to such indiscreet persons, as trusting to their prayers, lay themselves open to trials, under which the grace of God is by no means engaged to succour them. But to triumph with more security, it is expedient to join the mortification of the flesh with watchfulness and prayer.

No, said Tertullian, speaking to the faithful, in the times of the persecutions, I shall never be persuaded that a pampered body is competent to enter the lists with torments. What this father said of the persecutions, which were the outward and public trials of the Church, I say with equal reason of the interior and particular temptations of each Christian. Grace must overcome them : but in vain do we hope, that grace, all-powerful as it is, will do the work, unless we ourselves subject that flesh, which is their source. Whoever judges otherwise, is mistaken.

But would you know, Christians, in what this mortification consists ? Do not here consult the world : this virtue is utterly misunderstood in it. But whatever idea the world may form of it, the oracle of the apostle still subsists ; which informs us that to *belong to Christ, we must crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences.* Gal. v. 24. Whatever the world may think of it, it will be always true to say, that there is no state of life, in which this crucifixion of the flesh is not of absolute necessity ; because there is no one that is not open to temptations.

Consider it therefore as a certainty, and this is the whole consequence almost of the reflection before you, that you will never overcome the temptations, incident to human nature, while you obey the flesh, and comply with its sensual dictates.

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Nevertheless, brethren, it is proper I should apprize you, before I finish this discourse, that notwithstanding the submission you owe to God, under the various trials he may please to send you, you may petition him, without fear of incurring his displeasure, to deliver you from some certain temptations ; from those violent and impetuous ones, that disarm the heart, in spite of its resistance ; from those, that insinuate themselves with so much art, as to gain admittance, before they are perceived almost ; from those that we know, by long experience, have ever triumphed over our weakness. As nevertheless we cannot oppose the designs of the Deity, and he may judge proper, either by way of punishment or of trial, to expose us to temptations of this nature, we must act in the following manner.

If, in defiance of the most careful vigilance, of the most fervent prayer, of the most rigid mortification, the solicitations to evil be still troublesome, let us receive them with resignation ; but resist them with courage. Let us receive them with resignation : they are a scourge in the hand of God to punish us ; or a fire, which he makes use of for our refinement. Let us resist them with courage ; and not like cowards, throw down our arms at the approach of danger.

For after all, if we consider temptations in themselves, they forbode no harm. On the contrary, they shew that you belong to the Lord, since his enemy attacks you with so much fury. He tempts not the wicked, who are already his slaves. But for you, my brethren, (and it is a consolation to me that I can tell you so) if the devil ceases not to importune and solicit you to evil, it is because he perceives in you the mark of predestination and the glorious stamp of immortality.

Oh ! my dear friends, let me conjure you, by the bowels of your Redeemer's mercy, to preserve, with the utmost care, the illustrious character, with which you are invested ; and not to purchase, by abandoning yourselves to Satan, the wretched satisfaction of being no more molested. Take for the patterns of your conduct those holy persons, that have spoke by divine inspiration : *Behold*, says St. James, *we account them blessed, who have suffered*. James v. 11. Little as you may have read, you cannot but be acquainted with the indefatigable resistance of Job, under the severest trials ; nor can you be ignorant, continues the same apostle, that your Lord and Saviour contended with the devil to the end. Form yourselves therefore on these models. And thou, O God ! the God of my heart ! compassionate my misery : *Say to my soul, I am thy salvation* : Ps. xxxiv. 3. O God of love ! should I be so happy, *my soul shall rejoice in the Lord*, ib. 9. *and my tongue shall meditate thy praise all the day long*, ib. 28 ; till thou puttest me in possession of that crown, which thou hast promised to all such, as shall have fought with resolution to the end. Amen.

T H E

The FIFTH SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY.

On G R A C E.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a Man, that soweth good seed in his field. Matt. xiii. 24.

IT is Jesus Christ, my friends, who here speaks of himself: let us listen to him with that respect, which is due to such a master. *He that soweth good seed, he says is the Son of Man.* Why does Christ, in explaining this parable, as he was afterwards desired to do, assume the title of the Son of Man? To testify his humility, say the Fathers, and his great love for mankind; and to inform us that, under this disguise he came to sow the seed of his grace in his field, the Church. He is the man, that *sowed good seed.* Whatever good we have, health or strength of body, vivacity or solidity of mind, fidelity or perseverance in grace, all is derived from him. *By the grace of God I am what I am;* says St. Paul; 1 Cor. xv. 10. *Nor are we sufficient, he adds, to think any thing good as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God.* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

A two-fold error prevails on this subject of grace, which I here mean to treat in the most simple manner I can. Some Christians have too little, others too much reliance on it. The diffidence of the one, and the presumption of the other shall make the division of the present discourse. That both may reap instruction from it, I will point out to the former their injustice in neglecting grace, and distrusting its assistance: and I will expose the presumption of the latter, who think proper to leave every thing to its operation. Sower of the good seed! drop a grain of it
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on our hearts ; who, conscious of our total inability, now implore this blessing of thee.

What, my brethren, is the result of all your reflections on the important subject now before us ? Is it not too generally illusion and deceit ? You endeavour to persuade yourselves that you are not obligated to take any step towards salvation, because you suppose it impossible to succeed. First ; the magnitude of your avowed wickedness affrights you ; in the next place, the difficulties of your state of life occur. These are the terrors, that frequently discourage you ; these the two rocks, on which so many pious thoughts, suggested by grace, founder.

Are you willing, Christians, to yield to the solicitations of grace, which so long has sought to win you ? If you are, I dare to assert that you are in the wrong to dissuade ; since grace, so far from being averse to your desires, presents itself to your assistance. Yes ; this God, whom you have so long forgot, so often contemned, so criminally insulted, is the first to seek you. Nor do I here say any thing, but what you have frequently experienced, and perhaps are conscious of at this very moment. That salutary confusion, he raises in your hearts ; that remorse of conscience, which incessantly torments you ; that secret horror of your licentiousness ; that apprehension of his judgments, of a miserable eternity, of a sudden and unprovided death, which haunts you in the midst of your impurities and dissoluteness ; all these sentiments are the effects of grace, that would reclaim you. Here, dear people, you must acknowledge that the finger of God shews itself visibly.

But let us see, Christians, if in refusing to attend to the impressions of grace, as you do, you are authorized to allege the enormity of your sins, as a just excuse. A few examples, which are more within your reach than any reasoning, will, I hope, both convince you of the contrary, and make you ashamed of your unfair distrust. Take up the sacred writings : what do they present you with ? A David, become an adulterer and an homicide ; a Paul a persecutor ; a Magdalen intoxicated with the pleasures of the world ; a thief converted, even on the cross. What do you think, my friends ? are not these examples so many cogent motives, that I may set in opposition to your unjust diffidence ? when you see these, can you dare to persuade yourselves, that your crimes, atrocious as they may be, can put an impenetrable wall of separation between you and your God ? You are sinners you say : but after all, are your iniquities more enormous than those of David ? have you like Achab, deprived by violence an inoffensive Naboth of his inheritance ? have you erected altars to Baal like Manasses ? Observe then what I tell you. If you are less criminal in the sight of heaven than these notorious sinners, you have more room to hope. If you are equally guilty ; after the prodigies, which grace has worked in their behalf, I am safe to say you have no occasion to despair.

Another reflection, Christians, may tend yet more fully to your conviction ; which is, that the Lord, insulted as he has been, is entirely willing, notwithstanding, to forgive the sinner. Why then will you be bent on your destruction ? Why damn yourselves in spite of him ? Ah ! brethren, how disquieted soever you may be, at the sight of the multitude

multitude and enormity of your sins, listen, says St. Augustine, to the Scriptures ; listen to your God, who assures you *he desires not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live*: and that, at whatever hour you invoke him, he will be ready to hear you. Are you not then highly criminal to reject deliberately so merciful a kindness ?

For if the Deity be thus disposed to re-admit you, what should you conclude ? that you are bound to return to him without delay. Because if God, through pure compassion, be ready to receive us, as soon as we look towards him, we owe this favour entirely to his grace. What a perverseness then to despair amidst such incentives to hope ? does he want power ? is his arm shortened ? what he has done formerly, cannot he accomplish again ? Yes, Christians, this God of mercies, whom I now preach up, is the same as untied the tongue of the young Daniel, and enabled him to pronounce so just a sentence ; the same as hardened the waters under the tottering steps of Peter, and who can raise up children to Abraham, from the very stones. And shall he not be able to break the chains, that bind you down to the tyrant sin ?

But here, methinks, some desponding Christian says ; my apprehension is not so much founded on the want of ability in the Supreme Being, as on that of inclination. What is it you say ? after affronting his power, would you insult his mercy ? If God did not sincerely desire your conversion, would he seek you so earnestly ? Would he await you so patiently ? Are not his mercies superior to your sins ? Is not his bounty greater than your malice ? What more do you need for your encouragement ? What more to induce you to say with St. Augustine, and in the like sentiments ? O Lord ! we have lost thy grace by our sinfulness ; but, happily for us, thou hast not divested thyself of thy sacred clemency.

The second thing, my friends, that inclines you to distrust grace, is the danger of your way of life, you say. But is not this to be ignorant of the support offered to you, of the wonderful effects of grace, of the prodigies it has, and still can achieve ? I need but open the Gospel to read the condemnation of your unjust pretences. There I find a numerous body, who follow the Lamb ; thousands of saints, who have effected their salvation, in spite of every obstacle, which their resolution overcame, in the like circumstances, as you now live in and complain of ; in situations perhaps still more dangerous. They conquered, because they dared to fight : they surmounted difficulties, because they did not despair of grace, but availed themselves of its help. Some of them became saints amidst the grandeur of the world ; as the Margarites, the Edwards : others in the humility of a cloister ; as the Brunoes, the Theresas : these persons obtained everlasting glory in cultivating their lands ; those in sufferings and misery. What they have done we may do equally. We have no more difficulties to struggle with than they had : we are enlightened, directed, supported by the same grace, as they were. It is cowardice then not to combat like them.

And what is to be inferred, Christians, from all I have said? unless that, possessed of the like means of salvation as the elect, who are now reigning in glory, of consequence we have it equally in our power to save ourselves. That without living up to the extent of the evangelical counsels, as the major part of them did, you must necessarily observe the precepts of the Gospel: that without that purity, for instance, and perfection which the hermits found in their retirement, you must notwithstanding put a guard of circumspection on your heart: that without continually singing the praises of the Lord, like his ministers, which your industry to provide a maintenance forbids, you must nevertheless say nothing injurious either to piety or your neighbour's character: that without being wrapt up in haircloth, like those penitents you have read or heard of, you must at least take up your cross, and endure with patience the miseries, to which you are exposed: that without condemning yourselves to rigid fasts, which your daily labours do not permit, you must however be temperate in drinking, avoid public houses, and all the licentiousness attending them, as far as possible.

Defer not your conversion then, any longer. What is it you wait for? The most noted sinners, publicans, women of bad character are converted; and by a diffidence, wholly injurious to your God, you despair of yourselves. Were you but sensible, brethren, of the mercies of the Deity on the one hand, and on the other, of the risk you run in procrastinating, and resisting his grace so obstinately, you would certainly be eager to take advantage of the invaluable blessing he offers you. So far from being discouraged, you would say with the like confidence as St. Peter: Alas! O Lord! in the wretched state of sin, into which we are plunged, to whom shall we have recourse, but to thee, *who hast the words of life*? But I doubt not, Christians, you are fully convinced of the vanity of all the excuses of the sinner, who resists or neglects the grace of God, on the idea of his inability, or want of inclination to assist him; that the whole is an illusion, solely calculated to produce a fatal security in vice. But there is another rock, to the full at least as pernicious as the former: the ridiculous presumption, I mean, of those, who trust entirely to themselves, or to the goodness of the Lord. We have seen the injustice of the one, let us now examine the folly of the other.

I here attack, dear friends, a different class of sinners, whose conduct is the reverse of those, I have been describing. If the former distrust grace and its independent author too much; the latter presume on it and their own strength without foundation: first, by relying too much on God's goodness; secondly, by depending too much on the means of salvation, he affords them: two dangerous and destructive errors, against which I will now proceed to caution you.

God forbid, my brethren, I should attempt to weaken the ideas you ought to have, of the mercy of the Deity. I know that his bounty sustains every thing: so many blessings on his part, our creation, our preservation, our redemption, the goodness he already has, and daily continues to exert in our behalf, all plead in his favour. It is not there-
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fore on the score of the divine mercy I arraign the sinner ; but on the perilous consequences of carrying his presumption too far ; nor shall I assert too much, when I say that the confidence of the offender, who is not determined to forsake his sins, and nevertheless hopes every thing from the bounty of his God, is a confidence altogether rash.

And why rash ? Because it cannot be grounded either on what the Lord has promised to us in general, or on what he has done in behalf of some certain few. For to what kind of sinners has God pledged himself to grant forgiveness ? Is it to such, think you, as make no other use of his goodness, than to insult him more grossly ? who, by an astonishing contradiction, confide in his lenity, at the very time they insult his justice ? who only make free with his commands, as I may say, because he is merciful ? Tremble rather, ye presumptuous offenders ; and so far from trusting to his promise, dread his threats. You flatter yourselves you shall be converted ; you depend on this favour ; but how long has a life, tarnished by the foulest crimes, been a disposition to the grace of repentance ? No, to be obstinate in vice is not the way to become penitents : to presume thus on the clemency of the Lord is, in the language of St. Paul, to despise the riches of his bounty, and weary out his patience ; it is to heap on your guilty heads a treasure of wrath. For, says St. Augustine, having thus abandoned a God of goodness, you shall fall into the hands of a God of justice. But if this confidence be unfounded in itself, it is no less pernicious to the sinner.

The inspired writings, brethren, furnish innumerable tragic histories of criminals, who relied on God, and whom nevertheless, he surprised in the midst of their career. Not to enter into a minute detail, I will single out the example of the Jews, whose reprobation should make us shudder. In fact, who had ever more room to depend on the mercy of the Deity than this rejected people ? Is there a blessing to be named, which he did not bestow upon them ? Their vocation, their deliverance from the Egyptian tyranny, their passage through the Red sea, the delicious food he supplied them with in their exigencies, their victories, the law, the promises, all seem to ensure to them the favour of the Lord, who protected them so visibly. But elated by prosperity, and become ungrateful amidst the blessings that were lavished on them, a too presuming confidence lulls them to sleep on the brink of the abyss. They are fallen, because they were too secure ; they are rejected, and accursed, because they hardened their hearts, and resisted too obstinately that grace, which, in defiance of themselves, endeavoured to force their eyes open.

Be candid now, dear Christians ; can you expect more from the grace of heaven, than the Jews ? Are you more precious in the sight of God than so distinguished a nation ? you, who have been so long rebellious to his calls and inspirations ; who are so insensible to his blessings, which you too often turn upon himself ; you, who so daringly violate almost every precept of the Gospel ; who seldom attend instructions ; who come to our holy mysteries with a mind full of dissipation : who assist at them without respect ; who leave them without profit ;

who neither care whose character you injure, nor whose peace of mind you disturb?—You sinners! you obstinate, notorious sinners! are you more dear to the Lord than the whole body of his chosen people? Can your vanity, assuming as it is, go so far as to lead you to flatter yourselves so grossly? Be assured that the like ingratitude on your side, as on the part of that reprobated nation, what do I say? still more atrocious crimes, will demand a more severe punishment. And this, in truth, is only reasonable; since nothing is more offensive to the Sovereign Being than the presumption I am speaking of.

And what makes it so injurious to God is, that the impious confidence of the sinner gives an additional degree of malice to his crimes. For, acknowledge it, ye rash offenders! what induces you to fly in the face of the Lord so daringly and so frequently? It is the hope, you conceive, that he will be so good as to pardon you. Comprehend, if you can, the unspeakable enormity of such a thought. You sin in the hope that God will forgive you. Is it not enough then to offend him? Must you make his very goodness subservient to your iniquitous purposes? a reproach, he makes to you by his prophets, *thou hast made me serve thy sins*. Is. xliii. 24. You sin in the hope that God will pardon you. Ungrateful wretches! must then the arm of the Divinity be ever uplifted? must his thunder-bolt be always in his hand? Has he no attractive qualities to engage your affection? O Lord! my God! Father of Mercies! I here confess it with confusion, thou wouldst be much better served didst thou more frequently display thy terrors. God is merciful, you say; undoubtedly he is merciful, and he must be so to an excess indeed: otherwise, long since you must have been sentenced to the abodes of woe. Oh! my friends, never thus insult the divine lenity by pretending so unjustly to exalt it: trust not to any more efficacious aids, which your ungrounded confidence leads you to abuse so audaciously. But what confirms your rash presumption is the assurance, you entertain, of being able to return to God, whenever you please. One great advantage, I allow, of our divine religion is to furnish us with numerous and powerful helps. But ought your past abuse of those abundant succours to afford you much encouragement for the future? Will it be so easy to return to your duty, when, on the one side, you be restrained by the relish of vice, by the force of habit, by the sway of passion; and on the other, you be compelled to resort to such measures, as nature shrinks at; to cast yourselves at the feet of a priest, there to make an humble acknowledgment of all your sins; to join with this confession a bitter grief, a sincere repentance? By what unlooked for prodigy will that, which now appears so difficult and shocking, become then so practicable and easy? No, brethren, no; be not deluded. Were the aids, which you look for so confidently, a thousand times more efficacious and more infallible than you imagine them, you will not return to God, I foretell you with regret. Too strongly attached to vice, or too much disheartened by the difficulties you must break through to arrive at the path of virtue, you will not return I say once more. The terrors of the Gospel, the thundering voice of your pastors, the prayers of the faithful; these and all other helps will become, through your insensibility, vain, useless, inefficacious. You will set yourselves deliberately
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to foil the triumphs, they may endeavour to gain over you. Why so ? because the Scriptures declare, that after an appointed measure of grace, the source of God's mercy is in general dried up.

Wherefore, whoever you may be, dear Christians, these awful truths concern you. For which reason, let each one strive to draw such inferences from them, as may be useful. If you be virtuous ; beware, according to the advice of St. Paul, of indulging in a too good opinion of yourself, and keep up a wholesome fear : let no one, continues the Apostle, be too confident ; let no one think himself invulnerable ; and above all, let no one condemn his neighbour ; let him, that thinks *he standeth, take heed lest he fall* : this is the advice I give to the virtuous.

But if you be a sinner ; were you even a scandalous sinner, an abomination in the eyes both of God and man, despair not : *shall he, that sleepeth, rise again no more ?* Ps. xl. 9. Cannot he, whose power is unlimited, convert you, if he pleases ? *Amen I say to you, the publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before you,* Matt. xxi. 31. Words most tremendous for the just ; but fraught with comfort for the guilty. St. Matthew, who relates them, experienced their veracity, when, of a publican, he was made an Apostle : St. Paul, of a blasphemous and persecutor, became a pillar of the church : Magdalen, once a woman of bad character, loved the most, and chose the better part. To-day therefore, without further loss, brethren, take in hand your salvation. There is still time enough, if you defer no longer. Renounce your sins ; do violence to yourselves ; by which means solely the kingdom of heaven is to be obtained. For *the kingdom of heaven, says Christ, suffereth violence ; and those alone, who exert themselves, may hope for its possession ; and the violent bear it away.* Matt. xi. 12.

Let us conclude this discourse, as we began it ; and may the sentiments of the renowned St. Augustine be for ever engraved upon our hearts. This holy doctor, explaining those words of David, *The Lord is gracious and merciful*, Ps. cxliv. 8. exhibits the two fatal extremes, into which sinners run in this respect. This person, he says, despairs of mercy, in order to sin more freely : that other presumes on it, for the same purpose. Hear the language of the first : my sins are too great ; there is no pardon to be hoped for ; hell is my settled portion : why not then yield to the torrent of my passions ? Listen now to the voice of the presumptuous : the mercies of the Lord are infinite ; he will give me a full pardon, whenever I return to him : I may gratify my desires then, and follow freely the calls of vice. Let us studiously avoid each of these extremities, my friends : such is the advice of this great saint who was at once the conquest and the champion of grace. They are equally dangerous. We must not disside in God's mercy, on the one hand ; nor on the other, are we to presume too much on it. However virtuous you are, be not too secure ; but however wicked, lose not confidence : the Lord still speaks to you ; *harden not then your hearts.* Remember that if you shut your ears against his voice to-day, perhaps it may never more call you ; and that on the use or abuse of the graces, God now supplies you with, your eternal happiness or misery depends : a salutary reflection during life, which at death will conduct you to the term of true felicity.

T H E
SIXTH SUNDAY after the EPIPHANY.

ON RELIGION.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed.
Matt. xiii. 31.

BY the kingdom of heaven is here meant the church of God on earth ; and this, says our sacred oracle, *is like to a grain of mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds.* For whether we consider the Christian religion on the part of its Author, or of the persons, to whom its dissemination was intrusted, there can be nothing more weak, or contemptible in the eyes of men. To see the Saviour of mankind born in a stable, of indigent parents, only known as *the son of a carpenter*, despised, persecuted, condemned to a public death and crucified : to view the Author, I say, what must we think of his project ?

And whom does he select to spread his doctrine through the world after his decease ? Only twelve poor fishermen ; ignorant and illiterate, contemned and persecuted, like their Master.

Behold, my friends, the origin of Christianity ; but at the same time observe its progress. This little grain, says the Son of God, *becometh a tree, so that the birds come and dwell in its branches.* Yes ; insignificant as it appears in its beginning, it soon becomes, like the stone, that Daniel speaks of, *a great mountain and fills the whole earth.* Dan. ii. 35.

After so many wonders, what do we want more, I ask, to engage our firm adherence to that divine religion, of which we are so happy as to be members ? To encourage you in which, brethren, I mean here to shew you, first, how amiable its sanctity ought to render it ; and secondly, the sincere attachment, it merits of you. From each of these reflections,

reflections, you will perceive it to be your interest to respect religion, and to be zealous in its cause. But let us first entreat the Father of mercies to kindle in our breasts his sacred charity, and to direct us by his light.

Sacred religion of my God! which ever side I view thee on, I see the marks of sanctity. To thee alone it belongs to exclude every thing evil, as well as false; to forbid all kinds of vice, and to enjoin virtues of every description; and to raise him, who obeys thy dictates, to the highest pitch of holiness. Of this, dear people, I hope to make you sensible, if you will but reflect on the sanctity we find, first, in the laws of the Christian institute; secondly, in its maxims; and thirdly, in its mysteries.

First then the mandates, I say, of the Christian religion, are holy. And in fact, what can there be more just, or more conformable to the rules of equity than its precepts? Read but the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, where they are particularly detailed, and you will see that religion, purifying the old Law from the prejudices, under which the Jews laboured, and reprobating the false interpretations they gave to the law of Moses, enjoins nothing, but what the soundest reason dictates.

Reason tells us there is a Supreme Being, the original and final principle, the first beginning and last end of all other beings: great, powerful, immense, eternal, &c. whose providence governs whatever his power has raised from nothing; whose bounty provides for all our wants; whose mercy is unlimited, though his justice obliges him to take notice of our misconduct. This, says religion, is that independent God, you must worship alone and without a rival; this is he, whom you must love above all things; to him you must consecrate all your faculties, your heart, your mind, your strength; him solely you must aspire after, as the Sovereign good, who alone can fill the desires of your souls, and make you completely happy.

This same law, my friends, in unison with that great principle of nature, which forbids us to do to others what we would not have others do to us, condemns not only the persons, who attempt their neighbours life; but them likewise, that are angry with, or insult him; not only those, that deprive him of his property, but also such, as injure his character or soil his reputation. Now who, Christians, does not perceive the sanctity of our amiable establishment in these and many other precepts? What innumerable misdemeanors, crimes, abominations, does it not banish from amongst us? and how unhappy would our condition be, did it authorize those dissensions and animosities, those frauds and iniquitous doings, that still too often disgrace the Christian name, in spite of all instructions to the contrary. But what advice has not hitherto been able to accomplish, let religion now effect on your hearts. Listen to her; be observant of her sacred laws; and you will become perfect Christians. For observe, brethren, she does not confine herself to one vice in her attacks; she declares a general war upon them all: she does not content herself with prohibiting the external evil, whatever it may be; but in order to cut off all occasions, and pluck up the mischief by
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the root, she forbids desires and thoughts no less · and neither teaches nor insinuates any thing but virtue, to which she annexes the most encouraging rewards

What shall I say, dear people, of the sanctity of our sacraments, those divine channels, through which that grace is introduced into our souls, which washes away the stains of sin? Sanctity being the characteristic of our divine system, it is sanctity it aims at in the married, as in the single state; sanctity in all ranks, and under every circumstance; a sanctity, which contributes no little to our happiness, even in this world. For do not imagine, brethren, that the laws of religion are hostile to those of sovereigns and states: on the contrary, religion confirms their ordinances, and in teaching us that respect is due to them, obliges us to honour them: nay, she goes still further, and commands us to observe an inviolable fidelity to the reigning powers, be they who they may; a duty, which no other institution but the Christian ever taught!

And what, my friends, should be a still further inducement to venerate that religion, under whose auspices you have had the happiness to be educated, is that its maxims are not less holy than its laws. To love to live retired and unknown; to fly from the glare and splendour of the world; to place our glory in contempt, and our repose in labour; to esteem the poor happy, &c. Yes, it is from religion we learn; what do I say? it is religion itself that makes us approve of these sacred documents: that *he who does not hate his soul*, i. e. according to interpreters, his flesh, cannot be a disciple of the divine Author of this heaven-formed establishment; that it is utterly in vain to flatter ourselves that we are Christians, and belong to the Son of God, unless we take up our cross, after his example; that it is a misfortune, and the greatest of misfortunes, to have our satisfaction here in this life. These were the oracles, that made such a deep impression on St. Paul, and which he thought he could not enforce too strongly on the Galatians, when he told them that to belong to Christ, they must *crucify their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences*; Gal. v. 24. That they must hearken to the spirit, and not comply with the corrupt desires of the flesh; that, instead of sparing this inbred foe, we must mortify, and in a manner divest ourselves of it; *stripping ourselves of the old man and his deeds*; Col. iii. 9. that to be the heir of Christ crucified, should be the glory of a true Christian; that he should openly shew himself the declared enemy of pleasure, and always *bear about him the mortification of Jesus*: In fine, concludes the Apostle, that *the life of Christ*, thickly sown with sufferings and misery, *be made manifest in our bodies*, as so many subjects, which it should vivify and animate.

Nor is this sanctity of our heavenly institute less conspicuous in its mysteries. Alas! Christians; did we but consider them attentively, could we avoid not only being astonished at, but even affected by them? If we attempt to fathom the profound abyss of the power and holiness of our God, we shall there see nothing but what is admirable, what is glorious, what is sublime. Scarce shall we begin to
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muse on them, before we perceive our gratitude animated, our faith enlightened, our hope confirmed, our zeal invigorated, our love inflamed.

And here, not to trespass on your patience, brethren; amongst all the mysteries, let us single out that of the Incarnation. With Christians, it is an avowed truth, a truth, I have an hundred times attested, that the Son of God was made man for my salvation; that this God and man humbled himself so far, as to take flesh in the womb of a virgin; that he was born in a stable; that he died upon a cross; that he spilt the last drop of his blood to redeem me and deliver me from hell. In making these reflections, can I help regarding my salvation as the most essential, the only affair I have on earth? Can I help preferring this salvation to whatever offers the world may make me of the most flattering nature, when I see that my Redeemer preferred it to every thing, even to his life? Can I help being touched with the most lively sense of gratitude towards a God, who was only born, who only suffered, who only expired on a cross for the love of me?

And here, dear people, before we close this first part, let us interrogate our hearts, and consider if we are what we should be; and to discover it effectually, let us examine if we live up to the dictates of the religion I am treating of; if we make it the rule of our actions and the model of our conduct. For we cannot here deceive ourselves; this is undoubtedly the end, proposed by the heavenly Author of this sacred institution, in calling us to his admirable light. Unhappy therefore they, who deviate from the maxims of this divine establishment; who believing it to be true, live, notwithstanding, as if they were convinced of its falsity; who build it up by their words, and pull it down by their actions. But happy, and a thousand times happy those, who square their lives by its laws and mandates. To such will the Sovereign Arbitrer of justice say; come and *enter into the joy of your Lord*. But having considered the sanctity of religion, let us next endeavour to inform ourselves of the zealous attachment, we ought to entertain for it; a point that I will explain to you in a few words.

In this second part then, I undertake to defend the cause of this institute, which, as you have seen, my friends, is so holy in its laws, in its maxims, and in its mysteries; and this I will do by remarking both what it merits in itself, and what our regard for it demands. Of all the objects of our zeal, the honour of religion claims the first place; as the most equitable and the most deserving: nevertheless, to our confusion be it said, it is the thing to which, in general, we are the most indifferent: or in other words, there is nothing, that has a better title to our zeal; there is nothing, that affects us less.

The world is divided by a multiplicity of religious systems; and amongst them all, the only one, that can claim the title of holy, is that which was taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles. There is the system of the Heathens; the system of the Mahometans, and the system of the Jews. In the system of the Heathens, all is confusion; in that of the Mahometans, all inconsistency; in that of the Jews, all grossness. Of consequence then, the system of Christ alone is holy and

and adequate to the great purposes of its Founder. But what inference does St. Augustine draw from these premises? that having had the happiness of being initiated in the documents of a religion so holy, so pure, so fruitful in all graces, we ought at least to be as zealous to honour and support it, as the heathens and the rest are theirs.

I see in the book of Genesis a Laban, who pursues his son-in-law and daughters, in order to recover his idols. I see in the book of Judges a disconsolate Michas, who bewails the loss he had sustained, and who replies to them, that enquire the cause of his grief; What! you ask, why I mourn, when they have robbed me of my Gods! *You have taken away my Gods, and do you say, what aileth thee?* Judges xviii. 24. This person had made his own Gods; and, however false or ridiculous they might be, they were still his Gods: and the loss of those objects of his worship was a subject of great sorrow to him. Not to mention the zeal of the followers of Mahomet, which in various instances is a reproach to that of Christians: how exemplary was the attachment of the Israelites to their mode of worship; which, although true, was nevertheless but temporary. We hear the heads of families talking of it incessantly to their children and domestics; endeavouring to inspire them with the resolution not to do nor suffer any thing injurious or dishonourable to it; permitting themselves to be butchered, rather than violate their sabbath; on the borders of the Euphrates, in their state of servitude, regretting nothing but their beloved Sion; and complaining heavily that they could not sing the praises of the Lord in a foreign country; *how shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land*, Ps. cxxxiv. 4.

Admirable examples, brethren, of the zeal, that should animate you, for the preservation and honour of a religion, which is neither false, as that of the Heathens; nor incongruous, as that of the Mahometans; nor dissoluble, as that of the Jews; for the honour and support of a religion, that seems entirely adapted to the use of man, by the solemnity of the mysteries, it celebrates; by the virtue of the sacraments, it distributes; by the weight of the examples, it proposes; by the certitude of the truths, it reveals; by the abundance of grace it supplies; and by the strictness of the morality it uniformly enforces.

Assisted therefore by religion, Christians; influenced by a respectful love of it, there are no temptations you will not be able to subdue; no human respects, over which you will not triumph; no virtues you will not be solicitous to acquire; nor any good you will not labour to accomplish. What further shall I add, my friends, to excite in you an affection for our heavenly establishment? With zeal, a true zeal for religion, all the avenues to salvation will be laid open to you; as on the other side, without it you will find innumerable obstacles in the way to your sanctification. For in short, dear Christians, can you be saved without loving God? Can you love God without loving the religion he has instituted? Can you love this religion without paying

it a due respect, without submitting, in all things, to its ordinances and laws?

But, at the same time, my brethren, let us confess, and with this reflection I will conclude, that the honour of religion is, in general, the last thing in the world we seem to think worthy of our solicitude. A clear proof of which is the tepidity, we manifest, when called upon to espouse the part of God, and the injunctions of his law. What a pleasure would it be to perceive you, when you fall in with libertines, that attack the Deity by their blasphemies, take in hand the cause of your Maker, and impose silence on those miscreants, who by insulting the Divinity, bring disgrace upon themselves? What a satisfaction to see you, when in companies, where such things are hazarded, either by words or songs, as dishonour the sanctity of our religion, stop the mouth of licentiousness, and repress its sallies? But what is your behaviour on such occasions? hearken Christians; for I say it as much for your conversion, as to shame you. So far from endeavouring to put a stop to the evil, you hear it with indifference: so far from declaring for your God, who is frequently mocked and buffeted by such impiety; you dissemble the injuries that are offered to him in your presence; satisfied with your own conduct, if you can but persuade yourselves that you gave no occasion to their wickedness. As if you could be ignorant of that assertion of Jesus Christ; that he, who does not espouse his cause openly, is in fact his enemy: *he that is not with me is against me.* Luke xi. 23.

Nevertheless, my brethren, be assured that a true zeal for religion owns no other limits, than those prescribed by charity and prudence; which, however, must at all times be our guides. The sacred writings represent this virtuous ardour under a variety of shapes. Sometimes it is a glowing and consuming fire, as was the zeal of Elias; sometimes a sword, as was that of Phinees; sometimes it is a voice crying out for vengeance, as that of Moses; sometimes a moralist, reprimanding with severity, as that of St. John the Baptist. But under all these different figures do you find your own zeal described, Christians? Was I in the wrong then to affirm that the religious ardour, required of us, is very uncommon?

And what is it that prevents you from siding with your God and adhering to his law? Is it not the apprehension of the world? Baneful world! Wilt thou always prevail over our most essential duties? Shall it be said that, rather than displease man, we are unconcerned about pleasing God? Oh horrible partiality! cries out St. Jerom. People mention the Deity in terms of irreverence before our face; we hear them pronounce his adorable name in the violence of passion; and for fear of incurring their displeasure, we dare not, when we may, defend our Creator and Benefactor. Ah! Christians, exert your courage in so just a cause. Correct the impious severely, and stop the progress of their libertinism, if you can. If you have not the authority necessary to chastise them; reprimand them, as they merit, and keep them within the bounds of duty. But if both these means be wanting; bewail their
misfortune,

misfortune, and beg of heaven to convert them. This zeal will do honour to the Divinity, and be serviceable to them.

And for you, my dear friends, what can I tell you in concluding this discourse? You say that you are attached to your religion, both in heart and mind; and that you firmly believe whatever it proposes to you. This, without doubt, is a great deal: but still it is not enough. Manifest your faith by your conduct; for what will it hereafter avail you to have believed, if your actions shall have contradicted your creed? The Gospel is the religion not only of the mind, but still more of the heart. That faith, which constitutes the character of the true Christian, is not a simple submission of the understanding. It is a pious affection of the will; it is a constant desire to resemble Christ; it is an indefatigable application to destroy whatever there is in us inconsistent with the life of faith. Although I do not suspect you to be incredulous in mind, there is an incredulity of the heart, that is extremely dangerous to salvation. The man, who obstinately refuses to believe, after having had all the proofs of religion laid before him, is a monster: but the Christian, who believes, and acts as if he did not, is a madman, whose folly is incomprehensible. Evince your faith then, brethren, by your works. Support the sanctity of the Christian institute, by Christian morals. Love it, and be actuated by an holy zeal for its honour. Thus, having spent your days happily in the practice of religion, you shall be called to receive the recompense it promises to those, who shall have been faithful to its obligations. Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

On the Abuse of God's Mercy.

The kingdom of Heaven is like to an House-holder, who went out to hire Labourers into his Vineyard. Matt. xxi. 1.

FROM the consoling parable, here laid before us, Christians, it is obvious to conclude that the goodness of our God, who thus calls us at every hour, is boundless, and that we should never disside in that mercy, the arms of which are always open to receive us. Let then the view of this infinite kindness animate us to set in earnest about the great work of our salvation. For it is no uncommon error on this subject to suppose that, because the Deity is merciful, we are exempted, as it were, from doing any thing, and at liberty to remain inactive in this most important of all our affairs. We even go further, and persuade ourselves that, in spite of our obstinacy in sin, we may expect every thing from the unbounded clemency of our God. And what is the consequence? that we gradually arrive at such a pitch, as to abuse the graces we are favoured with, by a sacrilegious contempt of the divine mercy; a contempt, which is ever followed by the most divine chastisements. On these two points, my brethren, (although I have hinted at them in part so lately) I mean to instruct you more at large in this discourse. And to expatiate on them in a manner that may be profitable; I say first, that the abuse of God's lenity includes the most insulting contempt; and secondly, that the punishment, consequent

sequent to such an abuse, will be most dreadful. Father of mercies! whose goodness is ever watchful to assist us, dispose us as we here entreat thee, to deliver, and receive thy sacred truths to our eternal welfare.

In what, my friends, consists the impiety of those sinners, that abuse the mercy of heaven? In employing this same mercy against itself; in imagining they may be wicked, according to the expression of the gospel, because the Lord is good: in rejecting grace at present, in the hopes of having a more plentiful supply of it in future, to atone for their profanations. Now supposing this disposition, which is perhaps but too often realized; what a pile of sins does not he accumulate, who thus insults the mercy of his God? hear and tremble: sins of ingratitude; sins of presumption; sins of malice. Is this sufficient to make you conceive the enormity of his guilt?

I say, in the first place, sins of ingratitude; and in this respect, may not we confess ourselves most culpable? Secretly admonished, and interiorly invited to correspond with grace, how often have we proved refractory? Did we reflect who he is, and what we are, should we not blush to see the Sovereign of the universe, after having been frequently offended, come himself to knock at our door, as the scriptures express it, and solicit our friendship? What shall I admire most, O God! thy patience, or our ingratitude? thy love or our obduracy? and how great will hereafter be our confusion, if thou art so kind as to take the bandage off our eyes? how insupportable our shame, when thou shalt clearly convince us that we are so ungrateful, as to turn thy best gifts upon thyself?

Learn then, Christians, the obligations you owe to the Lord, for having, by the pure effect of his tender mercy, endured you so long. For in what respect were you less odious, than so many criminals, whom he has surprised, and cut off in the height of their iniquities? Nevertheless, this gracious Deity has looked favourably on you; whilst he has turned his eyes from innumerable others, perchance less guilty than yourselves. For, dear brethren; to stir up that gratitude which you owe to so merciful a God, probe your wounds. Recollect your past errors, your oaths, your debaucheries, your lewdness, and all the horrors of your life. At that time, perhaps, you were more rebellious to the lights of the Holy Ghost, than any of the sinners, whom he has already punished. And yet, whilst he has crushed so many others, less undeserving than yourselves, he has spared you, and afforded you time for your conversion. What thanks do you not owe to the ineffable goodness of the Lord, who has preserved you from hell; in which, long since, you should have been the victims of his wrath? How many of your acquaintance, of your associates in wickedness, have you known to die in the wretched state, in which you lived for so many years? Recall them to your remembrance: and far from being ungrateful, daily do your best to give your Maker the strongest proofs of your acknowledgment: otherwise dread every thing from his justice.

But

But God is good, you urge. Yes, and nothing proves it more evidently than his having so long, and still continuing to expect you. He is good; but to whom? *to them that are of a right heart*, and do not place their dependence without a just foundation. For to what lengths does the rashness of the person carry him, who sins on a mistaken confidence? Why not give loose, he says, to the most infamous passions? the mercy of the Lord can pardon every thing. Hence what a range for impiety and the most horrid crimes? Ah! said St. Paul, let not the patience of the Deity open a door to impenitence. On the contrary, the sole motive of his bearing with, and waiting for you so long, is the prospect of your conversion. *Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?* Rom. ii. 4. And will you then *despise the riches of his goodness?* Ib. But why should we be uneasy? The time will come, you say, when we shall repent. Take heed, however, Christians, lest this impious presumption should render you infinitely more guilty, and add immensely to the weight of your sins.

For not to mention that it is in vain to flatter yourselves with the hopes of a future conversion: I will only note what you say, and condemn you on your own words. You offend your Maker then because you hope to appease him hereafter: You libertines, because you mean one day or other to drop your licentious pursuits; you drunkards, because you purpose to be more temperate; you detractors, because you design to become charitable to your neighbours. In the mean while you do not renounce your impurities, your excesses, your slanders: you cannot determine to forsake the actual state of sin, in which you live. By this means, how outrageously do you insult the mercy of your God, in making use against it of that time, of those graces it affords you, on the chimerical expectation, that you shall some time or other repent of the wicked life, you lead at present? Candidly, what would you think of the man, who having received many favours from you, should load you with the most pointed insults, and then should beg your pardon; which, he adds, he was always sure of obtaining on the first application? Would you not look upon him as a worthless wretch, whose ingratitude and insolence rendered him undeserving of any future kindness? This is exactly notwithstanding the way, in which you act in regard to the Sovereign Being, on that ridiculous pretext of a future repentance. I am sensible I do wrong, you say, in yielding to intemperance; but a good confession will set every thing to rights again. May I not here justly exclaim with the wise man, *O wicked presumption! whence camest thou to cover the earth with thy malice?* Eccclus. xxxvii. 3.

To avoid such a reproach, brethren, let us oppose to this ungrounded confidence, a salutary fear of the divine judgments; not a base and servile fear; but a filial, a respectful fear, that may arm us against sin. This is that fear, so often recommended in the sacred writings; *the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.* Ps. cx. 10. Because this will ever act as a powerful restraint to preserve us in the way of righteousness: for which reason the daily prayer of David was; *Pierce, O Lord! my flesh with thy fear.* Ps. cxviii. 120. Let us be fearful then,

then, and not vain and presumptuous. For as I have already said with Solomon, what renders this rash presumption so pernicious, both in its nature and its operations, is the malignity that accompanies it : *O wicked presumption ! whence camest thou to cover the earth with thy malice ?*

Perhaps you will ask me, Christians, how it is possible that a reliance on God, which is certainly a virtue, should produce such unhappy effects ? To which I answer, that the worst abuses are generally annexed to the best things : besides, do not imagine that the dependence on the Deity, which you retain at the very time you continue obstinate in sin, is that divine confidence, so often inculcated by our Redeemer. For first, every virtue is a disposition to good ; and the assurance you experience, is a propensity to evil. Secondly, a true confidence is founded on the love of God, but this on the contempt of him. For observe here, my friends ; those rash offenders, who so insolently abuse the mercy of heaven, do it not only in the heat of passion, but also coolly and with deliberation ; not through ignorance solely, but often, says Tertullian, through a kind of comparison, which they make between God and the creature. They know what the divine law enjoins on the one hand, and on the other, what their passions egg them on to. Deaf to the calls of grace, they reject its invitations, to follow the depravity of nature. This moment, awake to the recollection of God's favours ; the next, they lose sight both of the blessings and the donor.

How atrocious then must be the sacrilegious perfidy of so many sinners, who, enriched with the gifts of God, blessed with his sacraments, and called to his inheritance, are the first to leave him, and side with his inveterate enemy ? Alas ! dear people ; if, as St. Paul argues, he who had infringed the law of Moses, was sentenced to death ; what dreadful punishments may not that Christian expect, who insensible of God's mercy, shall have despised the blood of the alliance, with which he had been sanctified ? A thousand times more favoured, has he not every reason to suppose that his chastisement will be proportionate ?

The children of the kingdom, Christ says, *shall be cast out into exterior darkness* : Matt. viii. 12. An exemplary punishment this ; which will be particularly verified in the persons of such, as abuse the grace presented to them by the divine mercy. First, they shall be disinherited and stripped of their rights. Secondly, they shall be cast into exterior darkness. Do not deceive yourselves, Christians. If the patience of God ought to be your consolation ; this same patience should also make you tremble. He may defer it : but whenever he comes, his wrath and indignation will burst forth, and that perhaps, in the midst of your impiety. Do you reflect on this, my friends, when instead of availing yourselves of this sacred patience, you aggravate your sins by additional guilt ? when to your rash judgments you add slanders ; perjuries to your lies ; blasphemies to your oaths, and sacrileges to your blasphemies ? Will you be long suffered to pervert the riches of God's mercy to his dishonour and your own perdition ?

Doubt

Doubt it not, my brethren ; the Lord measures his justice by his mercy and his severity by his goodness. He had called you, as his children, to the possession of his kingdom ; he will reject you, for not corresponding with his mercy, as guilty of the most notorious ingratitude, of the most rash presumption, of the foulest malice. All the rights, he had given you to his inheritance, shall be done away. What a subject of grief ! Let us judge of it by the desolation of our first parents, expelled from the terrestrial paradise for their disobedience. Banished for ever from that abode of delights, how bitter must have been the recollection of their former happiness ? What a shock to the unfortunate Vasshi, when prohibited by the order of King Assuerus, to appear any more in his presence ? What more cutting regret than that of Esau, after selling his glorious birth-right to his brother Jacob ?

Such, and greater still, shall be the anguish of those bad Christians, who shall have made it, as it were, their principle to abuse the graces, so repeatedly offered to them by the divine mercy. Degraded from their title of *the children of the kingdom*, they shall have no further pretensions to that eternal felicity. In vain did we assure them from our altars, that their first care should be to comply with the graces of the Lord assiduously ; and that, in slighting them, they closed the gates of heaven on themselves. In vain did we represent that their disobedience would be more severely punished than that of Vasshi, and that they would be for ever banished from the amiable presence of their God. In vain did we apprise them that it was idle to plume themselves on the glorious title of beloved children, unless they supported this character by the renunciation of vice and the practice of virtue. Deaf to our persuasions, they preferred the transitory things of life to the permanent goods of eternity, which we promised them. They were blinded and in this regard similar to the unfortunate Esau ; who, ignorant of the value of his father's blessing, held cheap the great advantages he had yielded to his brother.

But, my dear people ; and such of you especially as are little affected with the solemn truths, I would here instil into you, know that the day will come when you shall reflect, perhaps, alas ! in vain. The day will come when, like Esau, you shall reproach yourselves with your folly. The day will come when, ashamed of the misuse of those celestial gifts, that made heaven so accessible, you shall gnash your teeth with rage, and cry out in the transports of despair ; what have I done ? how many inestimable privileges have I wilfully thrown away ? Having lost, by your voluntary contempt of the divine grace, such numerous advantages, what can you pretend to ? or rather ungrateful, presumptuous, malicious sinners ! what have you not to apprehend ? Hear what follows ; and, if every spark of faith be not already extinct, shudder with horror. These disinherited children shall be cast off ; but whither ? *into exterior darkness.*

On this side of eternity, we have reason, I grant, to lift up our expecting eyes to mercy. But how justly may we dread that, so long abused with obstinacy, it will no more plead in our behalf ? Relying on it without foundation, you have used it as the means to offend your God with greater insolence. It is done with : its time is past. Justice

will now take up its cause, whose province it is to avenge its injured rights.

Down with your assurance then, ye daring sinners! who so long have made it a system, as I may say, to change the remedy into poison, and to pervert to your ruin the graces of the Lord by a sacrilegious abuse of them. More guilty, in respect to the Deity, than the perfidious Joab, in regard to Solomon and David, what other fate can you expect, than one as terrible at least as his? Perhaps you are not acquainted with his history. Joab, in high estimation with both King David and his son, draws upon himself their indignation by his perfidies and murders. His death is determined on, and the punishment of his crimes must be proportioned to their enormity. No asylum for him in the very place where the greatest criminals had a right to seek it. In vain does he hope to elude his destiny by taking shelter in the tabernacle, by clinging to the horns of the altar. The sanctuary, which to others was a place of refuge, shall be the theatre of his death. Bananias, at the command of his sovereign, pursues him, stabs him and washes his perfidies and assassinations in his blood.

Ye offenders! who hear this, and who have so shamefully abused the long protracted patience of your God, if your chastisement be not so visible, do not hope it will be less severe. Dispossessed of your rights, your benefactor will become your judge. He will banish you from his presence for ever, to those mansions of horror, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth for endless ages.

And here, my dear friends, what can I add that must not necessarily tend to fill you with alarm and terror? This then, presumptuous sinners, is the rueful term of your iniquities: this the fatal period, in which irritated justice shall avenge the cause of slighted mercy. Till now, this God of all consolation has sought, expected, solicited you. But there is nothing to be hoped for more; his mercy is at length dried up. On the brink of the precipice, his avenging justice opens under your feet the infernal abyss, and you are going to be miserable in proportion to the means afforded you to avoid it. As many lawless pleasures, as you may have indulged yourselves in, so many dreadful torments must you now be forced to endure.

First, the torment arising from the loss of God. A torment, that cannot be measured, says St. Bernard, nor comprehended, but by the infinity of the Deity. A torment consequently as great as God himself.

Secondly, the torment occasioned by the vengeful flames. For the more graces you shall have received in time, the more effect will they have on you for eternity. The more sins, profanations, sacrileges you shall have committed, the more matter for this devouring fire; and of consequence the more will its activity be increased by your abuse of the divine mercy.

Thirdly, the torment of self-reproach. Could the reprobated criminal forget the favours, he received; the inspirations, he rejected; the calls, he despised; how unfaithful he was to God's graces; his abuse of the time allowed him; his inattention to profit by the means of sal-
vation

vation offered him, &c. hell, altogether dreadful as it is, would be no longer so to him. But no, all his crimes will now present themselves to him in a body, and make him feel his unhappiness so much the more sensibly, as he is conscious of having voluntarily incurred it.

Ye sinners then, whoever you may be, if any such are present as I have here described, trust no longer to mercy. Its reign is over. Whether you have despaired of, presumed on, or audaciously abused it, you have nothing to expect but to be eternally punished with those, who shall have contemned this heavenly aid. Religion itself is false, if what I say be not true. And it is but too much so, O Lord! for the unhappy victims of thy justice: it is but too true for so many reprobates, as are now howling in endless torments.

Any other misfortune but this, O Sovereign Being! If we want confidence, give it to us, and make us sensible of the motives, that enforce it. If presumption be our error, correct it, and *pierce our flesh with thy holy fear*. If, in fine, we insult thee by our abuse of thy sacred mercy, teach us to expiate our sacrilegious profanations, by an humble and sincere repentance. Let the sight of thy goodness perfect the conversion of such, as are already affected; and the terrors of thy judgments alarm those, who are unconcerned. In a word, have compassion on all, according to thy great mercy. For to speak of this thy mercy, O God! is our consolation; to experience it our support, and to receive it in all its plenitude must be the completion of our bliss. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

On the Word of God.

The Seed is the Word of God. Luke viii. 11.

IS it not astonishing, my friends, that the divine word, (the effects of which in different soils our Saviour here relates so distinctly) which in all ages has worked such prodigies, even amidst the most barbarous nations, should at present be attended with so little success among Christians? *The God of Majesty hath thundered*; Ps. xxviii. 3. and his almighty voice has triumphed over the minds, and over the hearts of the most sublime geniuses, of the most able politicians, of the most enlightened teachers; *The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars*. Ibid. 5. This penetrative voice has kindled the sacred fire of charity in breasts that were rebellious to it, in breasts almost consumed by profane and impure flames; *The voice of the Lord divideth the flame of fire*. Ibid. 7. It has pierced into the remotest islands, the untrodden and pathless deserts; *The voice of the Lord shaketh the desert*. Ibid. 8. It has inspired the weakest and most timid with a courage superior to their age and sex; *The voice of the Lord prepareth the ways*. Ibid. 9. Such has been the efficacy of this heavenly word formerly. And why does it not produce the like effects in our days, brethren? Of this I see, I think, three causes, which I will here endeavour to eradicate: first, a want of preparation, when you come to hear it; secondly, a want of proper dispositions in assisting at it; and thirdly, a want of due reflection, at your departure from it. Be attentive, dear people, and you will no longer wonder that the divine word should be at present so unsuccessful. But first let

us address ourselves to its Almighty Author, and implore his gracious aid.

When we come to hear the word of God then, we must prepare ourselves. But to instruct you thoroughly on this head, Christians, I must tell you in what this preparation consists, which I reduce to two points: first, to receive this sacred word as a present from the divine mercy; secondly, to examine seriously your motive in coming to hear it.

First then, you should receive the word of God as a precious gift, as a distinguishing proof of the favour of the Deity. The advantages, which you enjoy, says St. Chrysostom, are by no means owing to your merits. Without ceasing to be just, the Lord might have forgot you, as he every day, alas! abandons others to error and darkness. You might have been born in the regions of idolatry, where the light of the gospel has not yet penetrated, and consequently might have gone through life, without even hearing of Jesus Christ. It is an effect then of God's gratuitous mercy, Christians, that he prefers you, in the dispensation of his word, to so many others; and you are so much the more indebted to him, as he treats you with greater tenderness.

And here, my brethren, to put you to the blush, if possible, I appeal to your own conscience. Who among you ever looked upon the word of God, which you hear so frequently, as one of the great pledges of his mercy? Which of you ever thought of saying to himself, in coming to hear it; what am I, that my God should set me at his table, in preference to so many others, who petition for the very crumbs, that are still refused them? Acknowledge your unthankfulness, my friends, and blush at it. Have you not, in general, considered the obligation, you lie under in this regard, as the most irksome of all duties? how often have you sought for pretences to evade it? Alas! how deplorable would your situation be, was God, in punishment of your ingratitude, to send forth, according to his own expression, the famine of his word, to recall his prophets and pastors from among you, and to command his clouds to carry the dew of his sacred tidings elsewhere? Dread such a calamity.

A second part of your preparation regards the view, you ought to have, in hearing the divine word: i. e. you must question yourselves for what reason you assist at it. By so doing, you will discover whether your intentions in coming to hear it, be good or bad. By so doing, you will be forced to own, that your sole design, in attending the instructions of your teachers, should be to inform yourselves of the means of acquiring and preserving sanctity; to extend your acquaintance with the divine mysteries; to learn to fear and love God; to avoid sin and practise virtue. I am going to hear Christ, you should say. He is my preceptor, and will discover to me the secrets of his wisdom; he is my best friend, and will give me the most salutary advice; he is the source of eternal life, and will shew me the way to it. Yes, dear people, were you thus to prepare yourselves, before you receive this divine seed, the Lord, would bestow his blessing on it; and our land, as the prophet says, would yield its fruit.

But

But alas! brethren, how few are there in our days, who, in coming to instructions, propose such a laudable and christian end? It would carry me too far, to undertake to detail the different ways, by which this holy word is profaned. Let it suffice to know, my friends, that if, in going to assist at this sacred distribution, you be actuated by any other view, than the salvation of your souls, you can have no reason to wonder at the small advantage you reap from it.

For what do you imagine, Christians? Can you suppose the divine word will have any effect on you, when you hear it with minds filled with your domestic concerns; or what is still worse, with illicit desires or criminal projects? Is it reasonably to be expected, that this sacred word, falling on such an ungrateful soil, can fructify? Do you presume the Deity will work a miracle in your favour; as it certainly must be, to touch you at a time, when you do every thing to hinder it? For where are they, who, in coming to instructions, can say with David; *My heart is prepared*, O Lord! it is in thy hands? Ashamed therefore of your past abuse, in this regard, endeavour to remedy it; by going henceforward to hear the word of God with gratitude, and with a sincere intention to profit by the instructions of your pastor. Such is the preparation; let us next see the dispositions, this duty requires of you.

In the second place, my friends, I remark two very censurable dispositions, with which you often assist at the distribution of God's word, and which prevent this heavenly seed from taking root in your hearts. The first of which is indocility; the second, a want of respect. The former temper is a sign of a lurking opposition to the truths, that are announced to you; the latter, a sure proof of a contempt of them.

A most essential duty then, I say, in hearing the sacred word is to acquiesce, with an humble docility, in whatever any pastor, whose mission is unquestioned, may officially suggest, and to receive, with a respectful obedience, the bread of life, which he distributes. And why so? to the end, says the sacred penman, that the precious seed of this divine word may produce fruit in you, worthy of eternal life: *with meekness receive the word, which is able to save your souls.* James i, 21. For, besides the assent due to a word so authenticated; a word, which you are not to consider as coming from the mouth of man, liable to err; but from that of the God of all truth, who neither can deceive us, nor be deceived himself; to what a hazard do you not expose yourselves, if you shut your hearts against it? Since it is certain that the preaching of his word is the most usual measure, God adopts, for the sanctification of mankind, as I will make appear by a short remark or two.

First, I admit, brethren, that God could, from the beginning, have dispelled the gloom of error and superstition by his own light. But he chose to make use of man for the conversion of man; and if we look back to the early ages of the world, we shall find him incessantly occupied in sending out prophets, to every quarter, with his commands. Elias spreads terror through the kingdom of Judea. Jeremy checks the
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growing progress of idolatry in Israel. Jonas inspires the voluptuous Ninivites with a spirit of repentance. Athens, Rome, and many other cities, renowned in the page of history, abjure their superstitious worship at the voice of Paul. Paul himself, although destined to enlighten the gentile world, is instructed by Ananias. Wherefore, if at all times God has made use of the ministry of man in the propagation of his word, it is an obligation incumbent on us to listen to them, that are deputed to instruct us in his name.

For secondly, it has pleased the Lord to annex the knowledge of our duties to this sacred word. *Faith cometh from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.* Rom. x. 17. We cannot do what is right, unless we know it; we cannot know it, unless we be made acquainted with it; we cannot become acquainted with it, unless we hearken to the persons, that are commissioned by heaven for this purpose.

But say you; we would hear the instructions, that are given us with all our hearts, were they not a continual repetition of the same things. But I ask, Christians; have we not a right to repeat the same lessons to you, until you practise them? And in fact, although you have been so often exhorted to fly from sin, to do good works, to frequent the sacraments, &c. are there grounds to think that you are more watchful, more attentive, more religious, than you were. I will not urge this point too far. I will leave it to your own feelings to do you justice.

To this moreover add that our conversion is often the effect of a docility in hearing God's holy word. To prove which, I need but remind you of the multiplicity of favours, that are annexed to it, when announced by authority. The Lord destines Samuel to the sacred ministry; but this grace was only to be the consequence of the instructions of the High Priest Heli. The vocation of the Centurion, Cornelius, to Christianity was not owing to the word of the Angel, whom God sent to him, but to the prayer of Peter. Turn not then, my brethren, such advantages to your prejudice. If our discourses fail to operate so suddenly, a little docility on your part will enable us to instil into you a shame and horror of all wickedness.

But if docility be a disposition necessary to hear the word of God with profit; respect is no less requisite. And what so proper to impress this respect upon us, as to consider that it is the word of the Sovereign Being; of that Almighty power, which made the heavens and the earth: that in hearing his ministers, we hear him: that in despising them, we despise him? Oh! such of you, my friends, as neglect to hear the divine word; or, when you hear it condemn it! May I not say to you, as Christ did to the Samaritan woman; *If thou didst know the gift of God.* John iv. 10. Were you sensible what a favour the Lord offers you, when he puts it in your power to hear his holy word, would you make so light of it, as you do? Alas! how many nations are still in a total ignorance of the articles, with the knowledge of which he has vouchsafed to enlighten you? how many millions in idolatrous countries, that have never heard so much as a mention of our mysteries? why does he leave them in that state of darkness, under which they labour,

labour, whilst he displays the whole splendour of his light to you? Ah! did you but comprehend the worth and magnitude of his present, with what thankfulness would you not receive it? with what respect would you not assist at it? Is it not incurring the guilt of the most gross contempt to be indifferent to such undoubted proofs of his affection?

And here, dear people, to humble yourselves, recollect your past abuse of this heavenly word, and the little amendment that, through your fault, it has hitherto produced in you. Be confounded with shame; and in recollecting the past, say to yourselves; to what purpose have I gone to hear the word of God, which, although capable of reclaiming me, has, nevertheless been insufficient to tame my passions? have I taken so much as a single step towards subduing them, notwithstanding my long attendance on it? O my Lord! wilt thou not be disgusted with affording me such helps, when thou findest that I despise them? wilt thou not be provoked to see a heart, sensible to every thing, but to those considerations, that alone claim all its ardour? Wilt thou not revenge the indifference, I have so often testified in regard to thy favours? In short, will not thy holy word, which I have slighted, instead of mollifying, harden me still more? To obviate so just a punishment, brethren, let us prepare ourselves to receive the word of God with profit; let us listen to it with docility and respect; and, having heard it, let us make it the subject of our most serious reflection, as duty requires of us, in the third place.

What therefore are we to do, at the conclusion of a sermon? first, to meditate attentively on what we may have heard; and secondly, to put in practice the lessons, that shall have been given us; i. e. we must think of what has been told us, and we must act in consequence.

Our first obligation then, after having heard the word of God, is to reflect and meditate on it. And this obligation our blessed Saviour inculcates, when he compares those, who are too hardened, or too inconsistent, or too much occupied; who, having received the seed, either slight, forget or stifle it; either to a highway, on which it no sooner falls, than it is devoured by the birds; or to a rock, where for want of moisture, it quickly withers; or to a land full of thorns, where it is soon *choaked and yields no fruit*. No, brethren, no; nothing but an attentive consideration can make this divine word productive in our hearts. An indubitable truth this; a truth, that experience dictates, and of which the primitive Christians were fully convinced. Oh! what an edifying sight in the first ages of the church to behold, at the close of the instructions, either the virtuous musing, like Mary, on what they had just been told; or repenting sinners, who struck with a salutary confusion, went away in silence beating their breasts!

On the other hand, my dear friends, what a mortifying prospect now-a-days! when at the end of a sermon you are satisfied, too generally, with bestowing some encomiums on the preacher, without reflecting on yourselves; without resolving to avoid such company, as you find to be dangerous; to renounce your evil habits; to make good your injured neighbour's property or character. He has given us a
good

good discourse, you say; and what should you hence infer; but that, to profit by his instructions, you should endeavour to reform your lives, according to the plan he may have traced out? He has given us a good discourse: and what matters his good discourse, if you continue to live wickedly, and persevere in your disorderly conduct?

Would you know, Christians, the value of our services? If so, enter into the views of our ministry. Let your conversion be our panegyric, and let a sincere renunciation of such irregularities, as you perceive yourselves most habituated to, proclaim it. These, my brethren, are the only commendations, that they, who, like myself, are charged with the sacred office, can be entitled to. Or if we were so vain, as to look for those of another sort, you may thus punish us, and balk our attempt: if so criminal, as to belie our doctrine by our conduct, you may thus put us to confusion, and shame us by your own example. Otherwise, what else do we do, but add to our guilt, and occasion each others ruin? you by not acting as we prescribe, and we by not practising what we preach.

The second obligation, after hearing the word of God, is to put in practice; for not *the bearers of the word*, says St. James, but the *doers* shall be justified. Wherefore, it is not sufficient to be diligent in making ourselves acquainted with our master's will, we must moreover be faithful in executing it. For it is a truth, which you cannot call in question, Christians, that the intentional end of sermons is to teach you to act, and not to speak. Let the cause produce its effect then: let a contempt of the world, the love of God, the conversion of the heart, and an entire change of life be the result of pious discourses. For what will it avail you to receive instructions, if your lives be not more regular for them? would it not be exposing yourselves to the curse, pronounced on the barren land; which, after having been watered with the dews of heaven, yielded still but thorns and briars?

Beware then, dear people, of what you are doing. The word of God is a grace; and it is the nature of the divine graces to render us more guilty, if they fail to make us better; because they deprive us of every excuse. Alas! my God! shall I have preached so often, only to contribute to the loss of those souls, which thou didst design to save by my endeavours? Shall I have been a rock of scandal to thy people? Shall what thou hast said, be verified in the persons of my hearers; that the reprobate devoured thy word, and it proved a poison to their bowels? How great will be your confusion, Christians, your regret, your despair, when the Lord shall call you to an account for the many lessons, you have received, and from which you have reaped so little benefit? Such an advice was given you, did you follow it? So often were your vices exposed, and you yourselves pressed to repentance? how did you take it? what impression did it make upon you? did you, during all that time, make any effort to return to me? Ah! my dear friends, let us seriously endeavour to prevent such keen reproaches. Let us, in future, prepare ourselves beforehand, when we come to hear the word of heaven: when we assist at it, let it be our study to receive it with docility and respect: and having heard it, let us carefully

fully treasure up the maxims, that shall have been instilled into us, and reduce them to practice. Thus, and thus solely will this sacred word become to you a word of life, of life everlasting.

Immortal thanks be to thee, O Lord! for having given us this divine word, together with thy Son. But stop not here, we entreat thee, while thou vouchsafest to favour us with it by thy pastors, give us such ears as may hear; such hearts as may feel; and such feet as may walk, without deviating in the paths, in which thy sacred light directs us: that being sincerely converted to thee, and laden with the fruits of justice, we may hereafter receive commendations from thy mouth, and eternal happiness in thy bosom, Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY,

On the L O V E of the W O R L D;
in Opposition to the L O V E of G O D.

Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be fulfilled that have been written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man.
Luke xviii. 31.

THE present, brethren, is one of the most important instructions that I have hitherto proposed to your consideration. We need but reflect on the circumstances of the Gospel read to us on this Sunday, to confess that the spirit of the world is in opposition to the spirit of Christ. Whilst the one is preparing for the awful tragedy of his passion, the other is wholly intent on defeating the penitential plans, which the church is on the eve of forming; and that by such scenes of dissipation, as are frequently criminal, and always unworthy of the christian character.

But they understood none of these things. No, my friends, we may safely say we do not: for if we assert, that we do, our actions will give us the lie. *But lay up in your hearts these words,* Christ tells us, speaking of his future sufferings. Luke ix. 44. As if he had said; I do not require that you should dive into the obscurity of these mysteries. What I demand of you is to adore them in simplicity: What I demand of you is to take advantage of them for the reformation of your morals: What I demand of you is to be convinced effectually of this truth, that the love of the world is totally incompatible with the love of the Deity; *the friendship of this world is the enemy of God,* James iv. 4. i. e. Two very natural reflexions, to which I entreat you to attend, will set this matter beyond a doubt. In the first, you shall see that it is impossible to love
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God and the world at the same time ; and in the second, that the nature of the human heart is too contracted to afford place to two such opposite affections, after a petition to the source of grace in the usual form.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, informs us that there are in the world two very different characters ; the first Adam, and the second ; the man of sin and the man of grace. The inclinations of the former are wholly earthly, like his extraction ; the affections of the latter entirely heavenly, as his origin. Nor are their maxims less opposite. Those of the world lead to death ; those of Christ conduct to life : and what is certain is that we cannot follow both at once. If we belong to the world, we cannot appertain to Christ ; which, no doubt he means to insinuate, when he says expressly that *no one can serve two masters*, Luke xvi. 13. *for he will hate the one, and love the other*. The consequence of which is, that if you love the world, you cannot love God ; and the reason is evident. These two masters being in opposition to each other, their maxims are no less contrary, as you may easily perceive. What does the world approve of ? the diversions and pleasures of life ; things which Christ clearly condemns, when he says that he, who would be his disciple, must copy him, and take up his cross. The world esteems them happy, that abound with every thing, and have wealth at command : Christ declares the poor are blessed, and that it is a misfortune to be rich. The world envies those, that have nothing to suffer, and that enjoy the satisfactions of life without molestation : Christ asserts it to be highly pernicious to have our ease and comfort here. In a word, the maxims of the world are to seek out every thing, that may flatter the senses : whilst the morality of Christ is wholly pointed at the destruction of concupiscence. What then may we conclude ; but that it is impossible to love these two competitors at the same time ? since their maxims are so opposite, and their dictates so contrary.

A still more pressing motive to induce you to hate the world, dear people, is that you are the members of Jesus Christ, and as such, ought to be animated with his spirit. To belong to the body of Christ, you must live in the spirit of Christ ; since the members cannot live, unless they be animated with the same spirit as the head. Such is the advice of the apostle ; *let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus*. Phil. ii. 5. Live by his life then and with his spirit ; and conform your inclinations and sentiments to his. Now what were the sentiments of Christ in regard to the world ; He explains himself fully on this head to his disciples ; *They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world* ; John xvii. 16. *My kingdom is not of this world* ; xviii. 36. and in various other passages he declares that he disowns the world, that he knows it not, or that if he knows it, it is only to detest it. If then you be actuated by the same spirit as Jesus Christ, you must hate the world as he did, and renounce its inclinations like him. And can you say in conscience that you hate the world, and love only God ? You call yourselves indeed the followers of Christ ; but is it following him to pursue the pleasures of the world, with the greatest eagerness, and to be unwilling to participate in his humility, in his poverty, in his sufferings ? If you believe in
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a despised God, you should be glad to spend your days in obscurity : if you believe him poor, you ought to live in a poverty of spirit and disengagement of heart ; if humble, you should on this foundation erect the superstructure of an humble life. In a word, he is your chief ; you should therefore take him for your model. For your works alone can testify that you are truly his.

But what obliges you, and that most solemnly, to renounce the world, its pomps, its works of sin, are the engagements, you entered into at the baptismal font, on that happy day, on which you promised to abjure the world for ever. We have been enrolled, says Tertullian, among the servants of the living God, and are pledged by the most authentic protestations. We have undertaken to fight under his standard, and to espouse the interests of his glory. And what should be the consequence, but that we must be courageous, and studiously avoid every thing that may have a tendency to damp our ardour ? Moreover, friends, are you not engaged by your baptism, to live according to the life of Jesus Christ ; i. e. to practise diligently all christian virtues ? which, as I have already said, is inconsistent with the love of the world. By becoming Christians, as St. Paul tells you, you have put on Christ, you have accepted his livery, you have bound yourselves to his service. Is it not incumbent on you therefore to take his part against his enemies ; on which list he sets down the world as the most formidable ?

From all these principles is it not apparent there are few, I do not say in distant countries, but among ourselves even here present, that truly love God ; since there are so few, that hate the world, and live up to the maxims of Jesus Christ ? Did you love God more than the world, would you so often frequent ale-houses, lose your precious time, and frequently profane the Sunday there ? Did you love God more than the world, would you be so intent on hoarding up riches, and so heedless of your salvation ? Did you love God more than the world, when advised to go on cautiously, and to abstain from many things that are dangerous, would you reply with such temerity ; that, after all, you live in the world, and cannot help conforming to it ? Alas ! I know we live in the world : but still are we not Christians, and in this quality, have we not taken on ourselves to lead the life of the followers of Christ, to hate the world, to renounce its works, and dedicate ourselves wholly to the love of our Creator ?

There are moments, I make no doubt, in which, disgusted of the world, and perhaps convinced by experience of its emptiness, you would be glad to be delivered from it. But is this an undoubted proof that the Lord is the object, the grand object of your wishes ? Consult your hearts, and let them answer without disguise. Was it at your option to spend your days in tranquillity and happiness, would you not be overjoyed to settle here for ever ? would you not consent, and that perchance without much reluctance, never to behold the face of that amiable God, if he would but leave you to the peaceable enjoyment of the world ? Is not that critical moment, which must restore you to your Maker, your sovereign aversion ? Do the things, he is preparing for you, great as they may be, make a like impression on you, as those of the earth ;

earth ; of which nevertheless your enjoyment is very imperfect ? Would you not forego the immense delights of your true country, for the vain amusements of your exile ? Judge then yourselves, Christians ; do these sentiments speak an ardent love of God ; or rather are they not indubitable proofs, that far from hating the world, you are entirely devoted to it ?

But if I hate the world, you say, I shall be hated by it. And who doubts of this ? but what have you to apprehend from its aversion ? Know, St. Augustine says, that it is much more to be feared when it smiles, than when it frowns upon us : because it is much more difficult to defend ourselves against its charms, when the affection it shews, wins us ; than when its known dislike estranges, and compels us to condemn it.

But would you have us break off all communication with the world ? No, dear people ; you are not desired to throw up your way of life, or abandon your concerns ; but only to renounce whatever is criminal or dangerous. You are only told that the least you can do, to prevent the love of the earth from gaining a superiority over that of heaven, is to observe the rules of Tertullian, and maintain a christian moderation in your commerce with the world. " We bear arms, (says this Father, speaking of the Christians of his time to the Heathens) we bear arms like you, and go to war : but amidst those scenes of violence, in which every thing seems authorized, we neither forget what we owe to the God of Armies, nor that we are Christians. We do not relinquish all society, as if buried in a desert ; but we take care that these societies neither taint the purity of our morals, nor diminish our zeal. We have our friends ; but they are not the associates of our crimes. Whatever we possess, we are contented ; nor seek to add to it by larceny and rapine, by unjust and oppressive measures. We do not decline innocent diversions ; but in the use of these pleasures we are sober, prudent, moderate : we consider them as necessary relaxations, and not as serious employments, that waste time, impair the health, distract the mind, and enervate the heart." It is by imitating such models as these that you may hope to live among mankind, without prejudicing the love, you owe to your Maker. And to conclude this first part, let us acknowledge that if we would truly love God, we must not love the world ; and this not only because their maxims are so opposite, as to render it impossible to love both at once ; but also because our heart is too narrow to contain two such different affections at the same time.

I told you, my dear friends, at the beginning of this discourse, after our oracle Jesus Christ, that we cannot serve two masters ; especially when these two masters are avowed enemies, and their doctrines entirely contrary. This opposition I have endeavoured to shew you, and make no doubt but you are sensible that you cannot love both God and the world together ; nor yet compromise the difference between these rivals. To this indeed the world would have no objection ; because it does not desire to possess the whole heart fully. But this is not the case with God. To deprive him of the smallest part of it is to injure him. He will have it entirely ; and he only then possesses it truly, when he is
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master of it in all its plenitude. The reason the holy fathers afflict for this, is obvious. A little attention, and you shall see the difference.

For this purpose you must remark that the world, specious as it appears, is an usurper, and that God is our lawful sovereign. To argue on these principles then, (which I hope, Christians, you understand) how does an usurper act? As he has no right to the throne, on which he seats himself, provided he can but secure a refuge, he is satisfied. Not so the lawful sovereign. Conscious of his right and the justness of his pretensions, he will not relax, and any doubt relative to his claim is sufficient to make him call forth his whole strength, to reduce his rebellious subjects to obedience. Detest those horrid blasphemies, punish those daring robberies; with all my heart, says the world; but do not forsake that company, although your morals be in danger; do not break off that connexion, although your virtue be at stake; and I am contented. Let us not be surprised: it is an usurper, and acts consistently. But God, our true and only king, to whom every thing is due, will accept nothing, unless it be given unreservedly. He will have our heart; but he must have it wholly and without a division.

No, says St. Augustine, we do not love the Deity as he should be loved, if we love any thing with him, which we do not love for his sake. He will not be loved by halves; and he that does not love him as much as he can, does not love him as he ought. Strive then, Christians, to entertain sentiments worthy of your God, and seek him, as the wise man inculcates, *in simplicity of heart*; Wis. i. i. i. e. with a heart that is not divided between him and the world. He is good, our Sovereign good; and he will be sought, loved and adored alone.

Do not then aim at an impossibility, brethren, as it certainly is to unite God and the world. Alas! *what fellowship hath light with darkness? what concord hath Christ with Belial?* 2. Cor. vi. 14. How long, said Elias to the Israelites, *do you halt between two sides?* 3 Kings xviii. 21. If Baal be a phantom, why offer him your incense? If the God of Israel be the true God, why not range under his standard? How long will you hesitate which side to take? Terrible words these, which concern you, Christians, equally with the Jews; and which reproach you with your inconstancy in the same line: you, who pretend to serve two masters; by dividing yourselves so frequently between heaven and earth; by serving God at intervals and by fits, as I may say: and at other times giving your whole affection to the world. To what purpose *to halt between two sides?* If you be resolved to adhere to the Lord, give your whole allegiance to him, as he commands. On the contrary, if you declare for the world, do not pretend to belong to God, which is the part of a hypocrite. Is it not a shame to profess the life of a Christian, and to lead that of the worldling: to be believers in name, and infidels in practice?

Awake then from your lethargy. What more is wanting to remove your indifference, than the insufficiency of all the world holds out to you? *Ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanities and lies?* Ps. iv. 3. "Senseless mortals! cries out St. Augustine, why do you pursue with such

such ardour the vilest and most contemptible of objects, as if they were the best and most desirable ?" Every thing, the world can offer, is beneath you ; although you pretend to place your whole happiness in its enjoyments. But know that God alone can fill your hearts to their satisfaction ; and that solid peace and everlasting felicity is solely to be found in him. *Come to me all ye that labour and I will refresh you.* Matt. xi. 28.

What then do you wait for, brethren ? Is it not yet time to side with Jesus Christ ? or have you not followed the world, and lived according to its maxims long enough ? Espouse the cause of your Sovereign good without delay : declare for him now, and resolve to lead, in future, a life consistent with its dictates. The love of God and that of the world are incompatible, as you have witnessed ; they cannot subsist in the same breast. If you are willing then that the former should take the lead in your heart, you must indispensably dismiss the latter. To accomplish which, take up the determination to practise, in every respect, the contrary to what the world inculcates. Say to yourselves : the world tells me it is cowardice to pardon an injury, when I have it in my power to resent it : for my part, I am resolved not only to forgive them, that offend me, but to embrace every opportunity of obliging them ; such is the command of my Redeemer. The world deems the persons happy, that wallow in riches and sensual delights : and I maintain such solely to be truly so, as drink the waters of affliction : for their momentary tribulations will ensure to them permanent and eternal joys ; so Jesus Christ asserts. The world says I must adopt its modes and customs, and catch at pleasure with a greedy hand : and I declare the world is not the rule I am to consult ; but that I am bound to live in a perfect disengagement, in an exemplary modesty, and in the greatest retirement that my condition will admit of ; so Christ directs me. Which to follow ? can a Christian, instructed in the tenets of religion, hesitate ? or rather should he not be resolved to sacrifice a thousand worlds to the love of Christ ?

It shall be so, my God ! I remember that on being made a member of thy Church, I renounced the world and its pomps ; and I have not forgot the obligations of my baptismal contract. But since, to my misfortune, I have hitherto made too light of them, I will here ratify them anew. Yes, I now protest in the face of heaven and earth, that I will never more have any connexion with this perverse world, which I have long ago abjured. Perfidious, delusive world ! I renounce thy habits, thy laws, thy allegiance ; and will henceforth belong solely to my Jesus. I will adhere to thy maxims, my divine Saviour ! I will model my future conduct by thy pattern. I will endeavour to please thee alone, regardless of what the world may say. What further shall I add, my God ! I will live and die for thee ; that my death may be the commencement of a life of endless happiness. Amen.

T H E

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On the Importance of Salvation.

Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed.

John xx. 29.

AND why, my friends? Because their faith in Jesus Christ and his doctrine will make abundant recompense for whatever they may lose, by not enjoying the visible presence of their Saviour, as the apostles did. We still shall have *life in his name*, if we do what he prescribes; i. e. if we *seek in the first place the kingdom of God*. Matt. vi. 33. This is the grand search he recommends: a search, which, to our confusion let us own, we have hitherto little thought of making. But whence the source of our neglect? We may safely say, that were Christians questioned on this head, there is not an individual but would allow that the business of salvation, which our Preceptor here terms *life and the kingdom of God*, is by far the most important of all the concerns, our present state admits of. We should all acknowledge this, I say: but whether or no we all believe it, is a matter that may be questioned. For surely, had we a firm persuasion of this truth, we could not fail to shew a greater consonance of faith and morals. The importance of salvation is one of those articles, which, while none contest, few, by an inconceivable perverseness, pay any, or at least a due attention to. To open your eyes therefore on this subject, I here advance two propositions, each of them clear, and calculated to instruct

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you on so momentous a concern. The first is, that there is no affair in this world so important as the affair of salvation. The second, that there is no one so much neglected. These two heads shall make the sum of this day's discourse; after an humble supplication to the author of all our good.

To render an affair truly weighty, three things, dear Christians, are required: first, that it be of consequence in itself, and independently of circumstances. Secondly, that it be a concern, in which each one is particularly interested: and thirdly, that the ill success and failure of it be irreparable: three points, that are all found in the business of salvation.

Solomon in his book of Ecclesiastes, xii. 13. informs us that the whole duty of man consists in *fearing God, and keeping his commandments*. Thus, says St. Ambrose enlarging on this subject, whoever you be, great or small, rich or poor, *attend to yourselves*. *To yourselves*, I say, continues this Father; and not to the profits of your employment, nor to the riches, which your industry has hoarded up. *To yourselves*; and not to your estates, nor the possessions you may inherit. *To yourselves*; and not to your ease, nor that robust health of yours, which bids defiance to fatigue. *To yourselves*, my brethren; to your soul; to that precious talent, intrusted to you; to that better part of you; which, while it is without exception the most noble, is, of consequence, by far the most worthy of your care. Your immortal soul is here the stake; this is the great affair that must decide its lot for ever. What object can there be then either of greater moment in itself, or more deserving of your solicitude?

And what adds still further to the importance of this business is, that if it fails, we not only thereby suffer an immense loss, but likewise incur the worst of evils. In this concern, if we do not gain all, we must lose all: if we do not reach eternal felicity, we must sink into eternal wretchedness: no medium is here allowed. Surely an affair, on which depends not only the acquisition of the greatest bliss, but also the preservation from the most dreadful misery, must be an affair of the utmost consequence.

And here the inconsistency of the generality of people shews itself visibly. They flatter themselves with the assurance of knowing the exact value of every thing; whilst, in this respect, their judgments are utterly erroneous. They imagine, for instance, that where the purchase of an estate, the lease of a farm, &c. are in question, they cannot be too cautious. I do not mean to say that discretion is not always commendable. But what I find fault with is that the like precautions are not used in the affair of salvation, as in temporal concerns; that they shew themselves so wary, so circumspect in the latter; and so heedless, so imprudent in the former. Neither am I afraid of asserting too much, when I affirm that Christians of this description understand nothing, and are as void of reflection as so many children. Such is the character, the Holy Ghost himself gives of them: *Ye sons of men, how long will you be in love with childishness?* Prov. i. 22. Let a child see the house he lives in, stript and pillaged, it gives him no uneasiness; but

but take his play-thing from him, and you will presently force his tears. Here, my friends, is the true picture of your own conduct. Has any one trespassed on your property? you feel it to the quick. But have you forfeited the grace of God by the guilt of sin? you care little about the matter. *How long will ye love folly?*

But what should make you yet more sensible, dear people, of the importance of salvation, is, that it not only is interesting in itself, but that it is a business moreover, in which we are all of us immediately concerned. The salvation of our souls, as the first rudiments of religion inform us, is the main end of our creation. For *wherefore*, says the Catechism, *did God make us? to love and serve him*, it replies, *in this world, and to be happy with him in the next*. In life there is a great diversity of conditions, I acknowledge; but however various in themselves, they have all one common object; salvation is the universal business. The duty of the King upon his throne is to save his soul; that of the peasant in his cottage is no other. This is the affair, which St. Paul terms, by excellence, *our own*. *We entreat you, brethren, to abound more, and to do your own business*. 1 Thes. iv. 19. Nothing else, says a pious author, deserves the name of business; but only that of infantile amusements.

Do not however imagine, Christians, that in exhorting you to give yourselves entirely to this essential affair, I mean to insinuate that any of your other duties, such as the improvement of your estates, the management of your families, your daily occupations, &c. are to be neglected. Doubtless they are not; and this St. Augustine teaches clearly, in explaining those words of Christ, *seek first the kingdom of God*. Matt. vi. 33. These words do not imply, says this holy Doctor, that nothing is to be attended to besides the kingdom of God: they only mean that we are to aim at this principally, and in preference to every thing else. We may lawfully, he continues, bestow our application on the employments of our state: but we are not to draw the line, and distinguish between these two articles, as if they were different concerns; the one to save our souls, by serving the Lord; the other, to make our fortunes, by living in the world. No; they are the same business in effect; for we must serve God by attending to the duties of life; and we must apply ourselves to secular affairs, by paying a due submission to the authority of heaven.

But to clear up this matter more satisfactorily, brethren, I will endeavour to throw a still stronger light upon it. It is an unquestionable verity that every concern in life should be directed to this great affair; because, as St. Thomas teaches, the business of salvation is the general end, in which each particular object should ultimately terminate. Human life abounds with a variety of conditions: but all these different classes, this great diversity of occupations are, in their end, but one and the same: that single principle *one thing is necessary*, comprehends the whole extent of them. Luke x. 42. On this ground therefore we may affirm that to speak accurately, we have no more than one affair upon our hands, viz. to save our souls; every thing else being reducible to this point, and nothing more, in fact, than different means of attaining the

the same end, which our Saviour styles emphatically *the one thing necessary*.

Add to this, my friends, what should perfect your conviction, that if this business fails, all is lost; since the Deity himself, the fountain head of every good is lost, for ever, without resource. Salvation is the affair of an eternity. Can God be deceived, who assures you that nothing else deserves your notice? Hear the lamentations of the damned; why such floods of tears, why such heart-piercing regret, if what they have forfeited, be of little consequence?

Should we be so unfortunate as to miscarry, in this grand affair, my brethren, what bitter reproaches shall we not make ourselves, when death shall have removed the bandage from our eyes? How shall we then condemn the useless drudgery of our past years; justly regarding it as nothing better than the labour of the spider, which wastes itself in weaving nets to entangle flies with? Our opinions at that hour will be similar to those of the elect at present: we shall then see clearly the folly of those avocations, that we suffered to take us off from this concern. *Their thoughts*, says Isaiah, *are unprofitable thoughts; there is no judgment in their steps* Is. lix. 7. In vain shall Christ have told us it would profit nothing to gain the whole world, if we lose our soul: Matt. xvi. 26. that no other misfortune can be put in competition with this: that every other loss may be repaired, but this of our souls is irretrievable. *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Ib.

Acknowledge then, Christians, that as salvation is the most important of all concerns, it is but prudence to pay a due attention to it. The world, whose judgment is ever prejudiced in respect to the things of heaven, deems the man happy, who contrives to raise himself and make his fortune by his abilities. But can we say the person's lot is enviable, who, succeeding in every other enterprize, unfortunately fails in the momentous business of salvation; and must deplore in hell, for all eternity, his neglect of this interesting affair? Yet such, brethren, is the blindness of mankind that, in spite of their conviction, this most important of all concerns is a matter they treat with the greatest carelessness, as I will now proceed to shew you.

An affair is exceedingly neglected, when we take no measures to procure it success; when we do not so much as think of it; and lastly, when, knowing there are means to bring it to a favourable conclusion, we affect to overlook them. Such is the conduct of the world, in general, in regard to the affair of salvation; and consequently it is an affair most atrociously neglected.

To convince you, my friends, and to shame you at the same time, perhaps, I only desire you to compare the pains you take to promote your temporal welfare, with the heedlessness you shew for your salvation. A few prayers, and those too often hurried over without much reflection, contain the sum of your devotions for the morning; such is the case in general at least: at night, a repetition of the like external piety concludes the day; with this only difference, that as you are then fatigued, you must, of course, be less attentive to what you are doing. In what have you spent the intermediate time? In the calls of your profession,

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in your occupations ; intent upon your own interests, and unmindful of those of God Brethren ! I appeal to your candour : was this matter left to your decision, speak sincerely, would you decree an eternal reward to the person that, during life, should have done nothing more for his salvation than what I have mentioned ?

Is this your practice, Christians, when your temporal interest is at stake ? Have you any affair of consequence on hand ? what do you not attempt to bring it to a prosperous issue ? you interrupt your rest, you shorten your sleep, you contract your expenses, you transform yourselves into every shape, to gain your ends. Was a person to come into these parts, with a view to prosecute a trial, on which his all depended ; if in lieu of applying to this business, he should spend his time in diversions and amusements, would you not think his conduct censurable in the extreme ? With you, my brethren, the point in question is an eternity, from which must follow either happiness or misery without end. Nevertheless, instead of giving your whole attention to so weighty a concern, you pass away your hours in a multiplicity of employments wholly foreign to your purpose. If you have words wherewith to do it, describe your folly yourselves.

Conceive here, dear people, if you are able, the just, though severe reproaches, to which the Christian exposes himself, who, sensible of the importance of salvation, makes it his practice to disregard it. *I desired*, will the Almighty say, to save you, but *you would not*. Matt. xxiii. 37. *I desired* it ; when I called you by my inspirations, and exerted myself so much both in person, and by my ministers : sometimes I tried to move you by afflictions ; at other times to win you by consolations ; now to intimidate you by threats ; next to rouse you by my promises. *I desired* it, but *you would not*. On your side, there was nothing but refusal and contempt, but delays and vain endeavours to accommodate your passions to your salvation, Jesus Christ to Belial. At present the scene is changed. When *I desired* it you were unwilling to return to me ; you may now perhaps wish to do it ; but I am no longer in the same mind. O sinner ! how great will thy consternation then be ?

Here however, brethren, I recover from my surprise. How is it possible you should strive to accomplish your salvation, when you do not so much as think of it ? Was any one permitted to explore the recesses of the human mind, he would certainly perceive therein a great variety of thoughts ; but most of them clogged to the earth, and few, very few indeed, soaring towards heaven. How many persons would he find, think you, whose serious occupation was the important affair I am treating of ; and whose settled maxim was this, I will save my soul at every hazard ?

Perhaps however you may tell me, Christians, that you design to think of this momentous business some time or other. But when, I ask ? when death, about to remove you out of this world, and to launch you into another, shall leave nothing before your eyes, but these two terms, salvation or perdition. You will think of it : but when ? when, presented at the bar of the Sovereign Judge, you shall

there await his awful sentence. You will think of it : but when, I repeat once more ? When, absorbed in the flames of hell per chance, you shall learn, in that abode of horror, that there is no salvation for you. And how great, alas ! will your regret then be, for having postponed the thoughts of it so long ?

All these things considered, suffer me to ask you, dear people, what can be the cause of your insensibility on this subject ? Of all concerns whatever, that of salvation fits the lightest on your minds. God has given you the whole space of life wherein to labour at it ; judging that nothing less would be required to bring it to perfection. You are, possibly, on the point of stepping out of time into eternity : what portion of your existence have you devoted to this business ? how many of your past years, days, or even hours have you dedicated to it ? what excuse can you allege for such an astonishing neglect ? unless it be the want of conviction on a matter that has been so often, and in such a variety of shapes, pressed upon you. For surely, were you thoroughly persuaded that an eternity of happiness or misery is here at stake ; did you sincerely believe it impracticable to unite the pursuits of heaven with those of the world ; and that each minute may be the decisive crisis of your fate ; were you to enter into these thoughts seriously, I say, would not all your exertions tend, of course, to secure success to this grand affair ?

Finally, my friends, whatever your situation in life may be, it is in your power to save yourselves, if you are willing. It will depend solely on you to sanctify that situation by your patience. Are you healthy and strong ? work and rest. Are you weak and infirm ? bear with your defects. Does the sun-shine of affluence brighten up your days ? devote it to God, *seeking his kingdom in the first place*. Does the gloom of wretchedness obscure your steps ? be fully resigned to the will of heaven : a sanctified adversity is a sure pledge of future safety. In short, whatever be your condition, your employment, your dispositions ; whatever the particular events of your life, whether fortunate or otherwise, every thing may contribute to bring you to the goal, to which you are running.

And yet more I add, dear Christians, when I affirm, that the means which are offered to you for the attainment of your salvation, are entirely within your reach. On the promulgation of the divine law, Moses told the Jews that he prescribed them nothing beyond their power ; *this commandment is not above thee*, he says, Deut. xxx. 11. And in reality, what is there so much at our disposal, as the condition in which we live ? you, that are afflicted, for instance, to offer your sufferings to the Lord ; you, that are in indigence, to bear your poverty with patience for his sake ; and the like I say of all other states ; the detail of which I leave to your own reflections.

Say not that to unite such a multiplicity of means in one point is a matter of difficulty. I agree with you that you must be diligent in your devotions, assiduous in learning the word of God, and in the practice of those Christian virtues, humility, patience, resignation, &c.

But

But the grace of God, and the cordial co-operation of your own endeavours, will make every thing palatable and easy.

Neither will I dissemble, Christians: there will be obstacles to remove; difficulties to surmount; enemies to subdue; all which must demand a generous and steady resolution. But you are sure that you will not be tempted above your strength. God has promised it, says the Apostle, and he will keep his word. Let hell redouble its efforts; his grace is more powerful than hell. Let nature be refractory; nature must yield to grace. Let the world oppose its legions; they will melt away at the influence of his spirit, like snow at the operation of the sun. *Have confidence in me*, says Christ, *I have overcome the world*, John xvi. 33. and trampled on its illusions: with me and through me, you also, my dear children, shall triumph over it, if you have but confidence.

Before I finish this exhortation, brethren; as it is your interest alone that I desire, give me leave to recommend three things to you. First, every day to allot some fixed and settled time to the exercises of devotion: notwithstanding all your labours, you will easily know how to spare it, if you are willing so to do. Secondly, to frequent the sacraments, as often, and with as great a warmth of piety as you can: and thirdly, if on account of your constant work, you have it not in your power to do all that you might otherwise be inclined to, at least to refer your employments wholly, and without reserve to your Creator. Finally, with St. Bernard, often put this question to yourselves; why am I here? Is it not to save my soul? Is not this the end for which I was made? is not this the grand object, in which all my views should terminate?

In concluding, my dear friends, I sincerely wish my voice was strong enough to be heard by the whole world, that I might say to each individual, what the angel said to Lot, in rescuing him from the flames of Sodom: unhappy man! *save thy soul*, Gen. xix. 17. What canst thou expect from going on with an infatuated crowd, wildly bent on their own destruction? Abandon their company, and save thy soul. Reflect on your salvation before it is too late, Christians, and that seriously I entreat you. What I recommend is nothing temporal; it is the salvation of your immortal souls; those souls, which it has cost your Jesus such a price to ransom, and render worthy of his glory. O God! who hast created them to thy image, permit them not to become the prey of Satan. Protect them, and conduct them sweetly by the attractions of thy grace to their true end, which is everlasting happiness. Amen.

T H E

SECOND SUNDAY after EASTER,

On the Model of Salvation.

I am the good Shepherd. John x. 11.

WE have no reason, Christians, to complain with the man, mentioned in St. John, chap. v. 6. who, having been afflicted with the palsy for the space of thirty-eight years, could in all that time find no friendly hand to dip him in the salutary pool of Bethesda, to be thereby cured of his disorder. What our sacred Redeemer then said to him, *wilt thou be made whole?* ib. I now say to you, dear people, in a different sense; Will you be saved? Are you willing to apply yourselves in earnest to this most important of all affairs? If so, help will not be wanting to immerge you in the pool; your pastors are always ready to admit you to repentance; the tribunal of the church is ever open; you need but examine your own hearts in this regard. Are you then sincere in your desires of future happiness? It will depend solely on you to find your safety in the restoring waters of that religion, which you profess; where every assistance is offered to you, that can possibly be called for. But as, in a concern so truly momentous, inactivity on your part must undoubtedly prove fatal; I will to-day endeavour to obviate it, and to stimulate you to a proper spirit of exertion, by the example of your Deliverer, who here styles himself the *good shepherd*, and, as such, must be your model in this great work; shewing you in what manner he deigned to labour in this business for your encouragement. Thy guidance alone, O God, can conduct us through the difficulties
of

of this enterprise ; grant it then, we entreat thee, to our humble prayers, which we will now address to thee in a firm confidence of thy help.

To pretend to salvation without Christ, without his merits and the necessary grace of his redemption, is the long since exploded error of the Pelagians and Socinians. To pretend to salvation through Christ, but through him alone and the sole imputation of his justice, is the capital error of Luther. To pretend to salvation through Christ and with Christ, but by a different method from that, by which he redeemed us, is the practical error of an infinity of Christians. The generality of us seem to think there is one road for our Saviour, and another for ourselves : for Jesus a road traced with blood ; for us a path strewn with flowers. Nevertheless, the leading principle of the doctrine of St. Paul is that Christ is not only the author, but likewise the model of salvation, and that we cannot be saved, but by walking in his footsteps. I will expose this pattern to you therefore ; and may heaven grant that this abbreviated sketch of the life of our divine Master may instruct us to regulate our own.

Jesus Christ then, my friends, *working salvation in the midst of the earth*, Ps. 73. exhibits to us the bright original of the manner, in which we must labour to obtain that happiness, which his merits have acquired. Now, it is certain that he worked, without interest or necessity ; notwithstanding which, he bestowed his own personal endeavours on this important business, and did not trust it to any of his creatures ; a consideration, brethren, that ought to win him every heart. “ Is it not astonishing, says Theodoret, that the salvation of mankind should be the employment of a God ? Is not Christ our supreme felicity ? and can we in our turn, poor wretches as we are, contribute to his happiness, in the smallest degree ? But what is most strange and deplorable is, that while the Son of God looks on our salvation as his glory and his bliss almost, we make it our sport to damn ourselves. If he be a Redeemer and a Saviour, does he assume these titles for himself ? If, by his grace, we preserve our souls from death, is it not ourselves we preserve ? If we lose them, is it not ourselves we lose ? In a word, had he more obligations to labour at our salvation than we have ? or are we less interested in it than he was ? Did he stand in need of us ? He, I say, who was happy without, nay, in spite of us. If you are righteous, says Job, what is the Lord the better for it ? If otherwise, what detriment to Him ? He was in no respect concerned in our salvation then ; yet he worked at it in person. If Christ vouchsafed to consider an affair, that was wholly ours, as his peculiar employment ; shall not we be ashamed to look on what should be our personal concern, as a business wholly foreign to us ? For such is our perverseness, we are sometimes moved with zeal for the safety of our neighbour, but seldom for our own. We are for reforming the whole world, and overlook the reform we need ourselves. A paradox no less true than melancholy. Nothing is so unknown to man as his own heart ; he thinks of every thing around him, but forgets himself. Strange as this may sound, it is daily too apparent.

And

And here, dear Christians, permit me to ask you : does our Redeemer content himself with simply wishing our salvation, with desiring it, with coldly expressing an inclination for it, as we do ? Did he confine himself to this ? In virtue of his infinite merits indeed, the sole disposition of his will would have sufficed for our redemption. But what was sufficient for our safety, was not enough for his love. He would seal his desires with his blood ; *I lay down my life for my sheep.* John x. 15. Let this, my friends, convince you of the folly of that common, but delusive way of talking ; I should be glad to be saved and the like. For I tell you that to carry the desires of salvation no further than such empty wishes, is in fact to damn yourselves. But still you say ; I hope for eternal bliss through the merits of Jesus Christ ; and I again inform you that your barren protestations will not do ; that if you stick there, all is lost, all is over with you. And why ? because it is no less impossible to be saved without good works on your side, than without grace on the part of God.

But methinks, I hear some one say ; Providence will do, in regard to my salvation, as in respect to every thing else, that relates to me, what it pleases. Are you then acquainted that it is the will of Providence you should work and act ; and that if you refuse so to do, this same just Providence will inevitably damn you ? I often mention damnation to you, and I wish to God I could speak of it still more forcibly. Perhaps, by the light of this eternal torch, I might at length succeed in dispelling that fatal security, which feeds your indolence : your conversion might be the effect perchance of such well-meant importunities. But the relaxed Christian will neither apply himself to his sanctification, nor willingly hear his perdition mentioned. Such has been the temper of all ages : as if to hear nothing relative to hell, was the sure way to avoid it. To what straits then, O God ! are we reduced ? To speak to Christians, men skilful in the concerns of time ; but wholly at a loss in the business of eternity. We are obliged therefore to reprove at least, if not totally disown their wisdom.

But to return to our divine model, friends. Christ worked at our salvation without reserve ; by which I mean that he directed all he said, all he did, and all, I dare to add, that he was, to this great, this single object. To this he referred the cares of his providence, the operations of his charity, the precepts of his gospel : his mysteries, his travels, his very miracles had our salvation for their end. This was the point, in which all his thoughts, words, and actions, seemed to centre. Continually occupied in preaching to the people, and instructing his disciples, whilst he made his doctrine known to men, he recommended it with fervour to his heavenly Father. A Saviour in every instance ; when not employed in giving lessons, he lent the influence of his example.

And what does this conduct of our Redeemer teach us ? unless, that we are bound to refer to this same end the general plan of our lives, with the detail of all our actions, even such, as appear the most indifferent ; inasmuch that there should not be a moment of our time, in which, if we were asked what we were doing, we could not confidently answer that

that we were labouring to accomplish our salvation. Say to yourselves in the morning ; to-day I must advance a step further towards eternity ; and examine at night what progress you have made upon your journey. Each day, and every hour of each day, prepare for those eternal years, and endeavour to store up treasures for them. Such Christians, should be your conduct, if you would copy your divine original.

Bow down, ye nations ! and give thanks to the immensity of your Redeemer's love. Be ye ever mindful of that excessive charity, which has visibly transported him beyond all bounds. He has purchased your salvation at the expense of his rest, of his life, and, may I say it ? at the expense of his grandeur even and his glory. What has he not done and sacrificed for it ? It has cost him floods of tears, inconceivable humiliations, unutterable torments. It has cost him the last drop of his sacred blood. You are sometimes troubled and scandalized, as it were, at it : but this scandal is at once his glory and your reproach. His glory, I say ; since it compels his very enemies to confess that he is a *good shepherd*, and that, to redeem his flock, he has far surpassed the limits of necessity. It is your reproach likewise ; since if you dare to allow that he has done too much, you tacitly acknowledge that you do too little.

And what indeed has our salvation cost us hitherto ? where are the exertions, the victories, the sacrifices, on which we plume ourselves ? Make up your accounts, brethren, under the inspection of the Deity. Produce your book of life ; for each one must have his own to shew at the last day ; and in this book of life, or rather of judgment and of death, you will behold with amazement that, for the thirty or forty years you have been upon the earth, you have not perhaps bestowed eight days seriously on the business of heaven ; and of consequence that, out of these thirty or forty years, you can hardly select eight days, in which you may say you have lived, to speak properly. For whatever time you have neglected to give to eternity must be erased from this calculation. You will see that, for whole years, you have done no good works, that will bear the test of examination ; and that, although you have but few such deeds to be put into the scales of the sanctuary, you have many evil actions to be thrown into the opposite balance.

But let us still attend to our oracle, our heavenly Saviour. Read his gospel, and you will see that in every page of it he speaks of salvation ; although he never mentions it without alluding to its difficulties. These very difficulties we all of us admit, and all complain of ; notwithstanding which, we act as if there was nothing more easy to effect. If Christ represents it under the form of a kingdom ; to obtain entrance into that kingdom, we must annihilate our pride, and become as little children. If he treats of it as a crown ; it is a crown of justice, which of consequence presupposes merit, the doing many great things, and the suffering many greater. If he figures it as a vineyard ; the master of the family will suffer no labourers to be idle. If as a banquet ; the concerns of life must be relinquished to gain admittance. If as a pearl, of sufficient value to make our eternal fortune ; we must
sell

sell all we have to procure it, and rather sacrifice every thing than not purchase it. If as a throne at the right hand of the Son of Man; we must drink of his chalice, before we can be permitted to ascend it. Finally, if as the house of God; the access to it is very difficult, and the gate narrow, we must do violence to nature: we must stoop, diminish and contract ourselves to force through it. *We must*, I say; the necessity is absolute.

The life of our Redeemer speaks still more intelligibly than his gospel. Contemplate that sacred model, dear people, and tell me what you think. Shall we indulge ourselves in perpetual ease, because the Son of God never gratified himself with any? Shall we never work, because he laboured without intermission? Shall we give up nothing, because he sacrificed every thing? Did this celestial Saviour, when expiring on the cross, say to us: Ye beloved children of my sorrows! ye Christians redeemed by my blood! repose in peace. Having already performed your part. I henceforth exonerate you from all the cares, all the embarrassments of your salvation; take your rest, and sleep securely. I have fatigued myself, be you quiet. I have spilt my blood for you, do not you shed a tear for me. I have both created and redeemed you without your concurrence, and I will also save you without your co-operation. I take the whole upon myself; my blood shall suffice for every thing. I promise you my grace, and this will supply you with whatever you may want. Use no constraint, but live on in joy and pleasure. Be in no pain about your souls; but rest assured they shall not perish! What do you say to this, my friends? take up the gospel, and form your opinion candidly.

Finally, dear Christians, the Son of God persisted in his endeavours for our welfare without ceasing. In our lives there is always a variety; there is a time of rest, and a time of labour; a time of ease, and a time of constraint. Not so in the life of Christ however; he has no privileged moments, no hours of intermission. Take a view of the whole course of his mortal state, and you will every-where find him occupied with our salvation. If he comes down from heaven, it is for this purpose, as the Creed of Nice daily instructs us. If he reascends thither, it is to adjust our places in those mansions of reward. *I go*, he says, *to prepare a place for you*. John xiv. 2. In all situations, in every circumstance, he performs the functions of a Saviour. Our salvation is his main, his only affair. He labours at it in the cradle and on the cross: he labours at it in paradise and on our altars; nor will he cease to labour at it till the last breath of our lives, and the end of ages.

What then must be our thoughts, my dear people, if we reason on what we have heard? what our sentiments, but the following? Salvation is an affair, that demands the whole time and life of man. It is an affair of preference and of the heart, without which it cannot prosper. It is a pressing affair, that we cannot begin too soon; but which we always begin too late, when we defer it only for a day. It is an affair ever new and fresh-springing; the end of which we shall

shall not see, until the accomplishment of our career. I have not a single moment therefore to spare. So often the dupe of flattering desires, I have said; the time of repentance will come, and a time more favourable for it than the present; but hitherto it has not arrived. Behold! it is at hand however: now am I convinced that I live for no other reason than to do the will of God. I have but one concern on earth, which is to secure the possession of him, my Sovereign good; every thing besides this is foreign to my purpose. Wherefore I now declare openly; let the whole world hear, and my friends be made acquainted with my protestation; to-day I take up this my only business, never, never more to drop it. It is beginning very late, I confess; but on this very account, I will redouble my efforts to regain, if possible, the ground I have lost. The gospel affords me great encouragement in this respect, for I there see that the work-men, who began to labour at the last hour only, received an equal reward with them, that bore *the burthen and heat of the day*. With what confidence and resolution does this goodness of the Father of the family inspire me? Let the world then drop its expectations from me; I have nothing now to give it; every-thing within me belongs wholly to my God; from the present instant, to the last breath of my life, I will sacrifice every thing to his service; I will do every thing for him; I will refer every thing to him; that in those awful moments I may be allowed to say to my Saviour, what my Saviour himself said, when expiring, *It is consummated*. John xix. 30.

Happy am I, my God! in having consummated the great work, with which I was intrusted. Thou didst fulfil whatever was announced concerning thee in the sacred writings; and I, by thy grace, have accomplished the injunctions of thy law. I never lost sight of the great model, which was shewn to me on the sacred mount; of thyself, I mean on mount Calvary. *I have finished my course, I have preserved my faith*. 2 Tim. iv. 7. It only now remains for me to await the crown of glory, which thou hast promised. I expect it from thy justice no less than from thy mercy; I expect it, and I here present myself to receive it. Now, O thou author of all good, and the finisher of my salvation! Now is the hour in which I come to reap what I have sown, and in which my feeble efforts to obtain heaven shall be repaid a hundred fold. Happy to have done something for a God, who has spared nothing for me. Happy again and a thousand times happy the servant, who shall have used violence to his inclinations, who shall have denied himself, and spent his whole existence for a master, who, besides being our Redeemer and model, longs to be our never-ending recompense and bliss; as I devoutly wish we may all experience. Amen.

T H E

T H E

THIRD SUNDAY after EASTER.

On HEAVEN.

Your sorrow shall be turned into joy. John xvi. 20.

O The unspeakable, incomprehensible, infinite joy, that awaits the momentary trials of God's servants during life ! To disgust you of the world, and to engage you to raise up all your desires to heaven, (the seat of joy here mentioned), it might, one would think, suffice to tell you, Christians, that God himself will fill this place of delights with his presence ; that, a thousand times more brilliant than the sun, he will overspread the inhabitants of these blessed abodes with a light equally beneficent and resplendent ; that he will here produce an ever-durable and serene day, which no night shall obscure. But, however amiable this heavenly Jerusalem may appear in the picture, which St. John draws of it in the Apocalypse, I frame an idea of it still more magnificent ; an idea, that you will easily comprehend, and which will animate you to do your utmost to arrive at these happy mansions. To succeed in my design, I will first exhibit to you, dear people, the privileges annexed to the possession of heaven ; and will afterwards trace out what is required of you to participate in those illustrious privileges. That what I am going to say may make such an impression on you, as to stimulate your fervour, God alone can grant ; and we will therefore, in the first place, implore his gracious help.

Represent to yourselves heaven, my friends, as a holy city, composed only of Saints ; and from thence let us infer that, if it be inhabited by

none

none but the virtuous, there will be no sin there, none of the punishments annexed to sin, no bounds to the rewards promised to virtue.

What can more effectually contribute to render heaven desirable, than that perfect innocence, that absence of every imperfection, which it implies? Imagine the comfort, those truly Christian souls must experience, who, of all the evils of life, dread only sin. Can they find any thing in heaven that can give them a greater satisfaction, than the infallible assurance of being delivered from this monster? In fact, to give you an instance of it; how happy should we be to live in a society of people, incapable, by grace, of doing any thing to the prejudice of virtue? Was there a city in the world, in which the inhabitants lived in that innocence of morals, in that Christian simplicity, recommended by the Son of God to those, who call themselves his disciples; and in which each one loved his neighbour with that cordiality with which he loved himself, would you not think such a place the most eligible in the universe? But what you cannot find on earth you may in heaven.

Celestial Jerusalem! and you its blessed inhabitants! exult in your happy fortune. *Put on*, says the Prophet, *the garments of thy glory*. *Is. lii. 1.* The Lord will not suffer any one to disturb that charming peace, in which you live: *the unclean shall no more pass through thee. ib.* Your abode shall contain none, but such as are reformed, divested of all passions, undeceived as to all errors, free from vice, embellished with every virtue, replenished with light, and clothed with charity. The most exalted shall be the most humble. No ambition, no envy; they, that may chance to be our inferiors in glory, shall make our elevation a part of their bliss, and eternally thank God for us. Each one shall be contented with his own lot, and with that of his brother. Then we shall have truly one heart, but a pure and sincere heart; the like sentiments, similar inclinations; but both of them reasonable and virtuous. It is a great happiness therefore to be admitted into the city of the Saints, because sin is banished from it, and all its inhabitants are impeccable. And this first privilege implies a second, Christians, that is no less to be desired. I mean that as in heaven there will be no sin, so neither will there be any of the punishments, that are its consequences.

This, dear friends, is a part of the happiness of the elect, that does not exceed our comprehension. We have nothing here to help us to conceive the ineffable things, which they enjoy; for as St. Paul says, the eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man understood what God has reserved for them, that love him. But for the evils, from which they are exempted, alas! we know them but too well, by experience. Pain, sickness, death itself are the effects of sin. Sin therefore being exiled from heaven, so likewise are its baleful fruits. To conceive something then of the happiness of the next life, reflect that it is free from the miseries of this. Pain, sorrow, sickness, apprehension, anxiety, all are banished from those mansions of the blessed. A full and unmixed joy reigns there for ever. There, Christians, you will find the abundance of all good, and the exclusion of every evil; a
happy

happy life without the fear of death ; unutterable joy, without the shadow of grief ; invariable health, without any mixture of infirmity. *The winter is passed*, with all its *storms*, and is succeeded by a never-fading spring. Precious advantages ! whose full value shall not be known till then ; and while the reprobate regret their past prosperity, curse the time present, and tremble for the future, the saints shall recollect, with infinite pleasure, the melancholy years, in which they groaned under the pressure of sorrow ; they shall congratulate themselves on having been the outcasts of the world ; they shall bless God for the portion he allotted to them ; they shall see clearly that had they been happier, they might have been lost without resource, and that what is the most displeasing as to this life is the best for the next.

Rejoice therefore all you, who seem to be the refuse of mankind, and the drudges of the opulent. Have a little patience ; in *the holy city* things will wear a different appearance. Your birth will no longer be objected to you, as a cause of disregard ; and the great, that now affect to hold you cheap, shall then most of them have a rank far inferior to yours. At least, you will never more suffer from hunger, thirst, cold, or any of those miseries, that you now feel so sensibly : all these things are shut out from Paradise for ever. No want, no uneasy desire ; no remembrance of the past, no apprehension of the future ; nothing, in fine, shall obtrude upon your joy. Happy Sion ! cries out David in an extacy of admiration, bless thy God ; who not content to *fortify thy gates*, has *set up peace* upon thy walls, as a rampart, under the cover of which thy citizens may be filled *with the fat of corn* ; Ps. clvii. i. e. with every thing desirable, that heaven can bestow.

We say, dear people, and experience confirms it, that let a man be ever so wretched, the immediate prospect of death alarms him. If this be incontestable, in regard to all ; how much more so is it in respect to those, who have every thing at their command ? Never to die methinks is the point, in which their views and ours too would centre. Now in heaven we shall enjoy this happy immortality to the full. In those lovely abodes, we shall grow young again ; and this renovated youth will never fade : *thy youth shall be renewed as the eagle's*. Ps. x. 5. To say all in a word, in that eternity of every imaginable delight, our state will be unalterable.

As it is evident therefore that in heaven there will be none of the punishments annexed to sin, so I affirm, with confidence, there will be no limits to God's bounty. All the tares having been thrown into the flames ; the fire of purgatory having purified the elect from every stain ; nothing shall then check the immense prodigality of the recompensing Deity ; and in this respect indeed his justice and his munificence will keep pace. He will lavish his rewards on his faithful servants without measure. The recompense, he will bestow on them, will be certain, it will be abundant, but at the same time it will be proportioned to each one's merits.

That the reward, promised to the elect, will be certain, we have the assurance of the Scripture : and observe that Christ, in marking out the different means of obtaining happiness, shews, at the same time,

time, the price affixed to the practice of the various virtues, he recommends. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*; Matt. v. 3. because, by renouncing the world, they shall gain a crown of glory. *Blessed are the meek*; not only because they shall possess the hearts of men in this land of banishment, but because they shall possess God himself, says St. Jerom, in heaven, the land of the living. *Blessed are they that mourn*; because they shall be comforted; in this world, by the unction of grace, and in the next, by a never ending felicity. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice*; because they shall be filled, and all their cravings satisfied; either in this life, in which God communicates himself to them; or in that to come, where they shall have nothing left to wish for. *Blessed are the merciful*; because the Lord will shew them mercy at their trial. *Blessed are the clean of heart*; because they shall see God, and enjoy the comfort of his presence. *Blessed are the peace-makers*; because they shall be called the Children of God; and God, in fact, will treat them as his children, by admitting them to a share in his inheritance. *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake*; because adversity shall be the cause of their entering into the joy of their Lord. These, my friends, are not the delusive promises of men; promises so flattering in appearance, but so empty in effect. They are the promises of a God; and he is faithful, says the Apostle. Therefore the recompense will be certain: I say more, it will be abundant.

Rejoice, Christ says to his disciples, *the reward* designed for you is *very great*. Matt. v. 12. But in what will it consist? I do not undertake to tell you, brethren, and it would be idle to attempt it. It is superior to any thing that I can say, or even imagine of it. Suffice it to know it comes from God, and that it is worthy of God, and is God himself. *I am thy reward exceeding great*. Gen. xv. 1.

In my Father's house, says Christ, *there are many mansions*. John xiv. 2. Some of them are higher than others: it is our comfort however that this distinction is not to be the effect of riches, nor of understanding, nor favour; but solely of merit. The more good works we shall have done during life, the more fruit we shall gather; if we shall have *sown in blessings*, we *shall reap of blessings*, and that abundantly. 2 Cor. ix. 6. Let us then give every thing to God; let us do every-thing for him: for not a tittle of what we give, or do for him, will be lost. And here, dear brethren, as I love you in Christ, and for Christ, I make the like wish for you as St. Paul did for the Ephesians; that the Lord may give you the spirit of discernment, to be sensible both of what is promised to you in heaven, and what you must do to obtain it. If you reflect on your future prospects only, perhaps you may be too presumptuous. If you consider solely your obligations, perchance you may despond. Temper the rigour of the obligations with the magnitude of the reward; and let the view of the promises excite you to the performance of your duties.

We all hope, my friends, for the happiness of another life; but there is a hope *that confoundeth*, because built on a bad foundation. On what then shall we ground ours, to make it lawful, and what are

our engagements? The matter is vast; and to reduce it into such a form, that it may be easily applied, I say that the bliss of heaven is only destined for them that make it the object of their thoughts, the term of their desires, the matter of their labours; i. e. we must think of heaven, we must desire it, we must act for it. By these three rules let us examine our supposed claim to this immortal glory, and see if it be not that, instead of having any right to pretend to it, the greatest part of us are so unfortunate, as to put a bar to all reasonable expectations on this subject.

No, brethren; there is nothing more capable to support you under the vicissitudes of life, than the hope of eternal happiness. We rise superior to all misfortunes, when we contemplate the splendor of that glory, which eclipses all terrestrial objects, to leave us the sight of heaven only. Every other consolation is inadequate; the prospect of futurity alone can bring us any real comfort under the calamities of our pilgrimage. From the view of this state of bliss proceeded those ardent longings, that pious impatience, which St. Paul felt and expressed so strongly, when he said; *I am straitened with the desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.* Phil. i. 23.

Such ought to be the sentiments of every true Christian, whose heart should be where his treasure is. Acknowledge however, to your confusion, that it is not the idea of heaven that, in general, fills your thoughts. On what grounds then can you flatter yourselves with the hopes of obtaining it hereafter, while you regard it with such indifference at present? Let the example of the Israelites shame you. If they considered it as a crime to drop the recollection of a city, which was but the figure of that, which we look up to, amidst the dissipation and the impious joys of Babylon: If so far from forgetting their country in a foreign land, they were heard to vent imprecations on themselves, should they lose the remembrance of it: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten; yes, let my tongue cleave to my jaws, if I do not remember thee:* Ps. cxxxvi. 5. what better rule, brethren, can you take, whereby to try your real sentiments? Thus, then, in the midst of the terrestrial objects, that enchant you, you should propose the heavenly Jerusalem, as the main object of your views. In a word, whilst on earth, you must be constantly employed about heaven, and lead the lives of true Christians, if you would hereafter have a title to it.

But if we must think of heaven, we must likewise desire it. Oh! how happy the person, who aspires after it sincerely! Supported by this desire, he is contented with all events. Attached to nothing, loving nothing, wishing for nothing, but what is eternal, his conversation is wholly in heaven. This noble desire makes him labour like a saint, live like a saint, die like a saint: he has no further tie to the present, he acts only for futurity.

How great then, Christians, is your insensibility! an eternity of bliss is promised to you, and so far from sighing for, you neglect it.
Whence,

Whence, O Lord! our coldness? Are then the things, thou offerest, to be slighted? Should not that inestimable immortality, that abode of delights, which is to be the recompense of good works; suffice to make us consider the earth as the place or our exile, and heaven as our true country?

Yet know, dear people, that, without this desire of heaven, there is no such thing as real virtue, in the opinion of the Fathers. Without this, we have but the phantom of faith; since faith itself is but *the substance of things to be hoped for*: Heb. xi. 1. the phantom of hope; because we can only hope truly for what we love ardently. Without this, prayer is not an earnest longing; how can we sincerely beg of God the coming of his kingdom, when we do not wish for it? fear is but servile; as it owns a greater evil than the loss of the sovereign good: patience under afflictions is but a virtue of philosophy; while it only suffers, and admits of consolation for the time present. What in fine shall I add, brethren! If, in the performance of your good works, you do not aim at heaven, all your actions will be void of merit in its regard, and cannot consequently be crowned there. Whence St. Augustine concludes that the whole life of a good Christian is, to speak properly, but one continued desire of future glory.

On these principles then, how many are there among you, my friends, that can pretend to felicity with any confidence? If it be certain that heaven is to be the reward of the most ardent desires, what claim have you to it? Is there any great difference in this respect between you and the heathens, whose views terminate on earth? What do you to convince us that you have better pretensions to future happiness, than they have? With the attachment you betray to the world, persuade us, if you can, that you wish for the coming of the Son of God, and that you give the desire of heaven the preference to every other consideration.

Hear how St. Chrysostom explains himself to his people on this head. If you be satisfied, he says, with this land of exile; if, in your hearts, you prefer it to the city of the blessed; if your absence from heaven appears eligible; so that you say of this world what St. Peter said of Mount Thabor, *Lord! it is good for us to be here*; believe me, says this Father to his flock, and I to you, my brethren, the country above is none of yours; you have nothing to do with it. With what face then do you pretend to heaven, where charity alone can find admittance? What you love, you wish for: the earth is the term of your hopes: how then can you expect immortal glory, when you do not wish for it? But to be assured of this point, let your desires and works go hand in hand.

I will simply remind you, Christians, of the different figures, under which our divine Saviour proposes heaven to us. It is a feast, to which we are all invited; we must leave both business and pleasures to go to it. It is a warfare, in which we are engaged, the success of which is dubious; we must make preparations

therefore, sustain attacks, and combat to secure the victory. It is a building to be erected at a great expense; we must know our strength before we undertake the work, and spare nothing to complete it. It is a palace of celestial structure; every stone to be used in the edifice, must be wrought, fitted, polished. It is a vineyard; the house-holder will not suffer any idle workmen. It is a precious pearl, of itself an immense treasure; we must sell every thing to buy it. It is an inheritance, which Christ has purchased for his elect; there is no other way of succeeding to it, than that which he has discovered to us in person. It is a throne, on which he sits, at the right hand of his Father; to mount it, we must first drink of our Redeemer's chalice. In fine, it is a reward of services, a crown of glory, bestowed on the winner of the race. These comparisons are in every one's mouth. God grant, however, that they be not disrespected for being common. But respected or not; as familiar as you please; in whatever light you choose to view them; at least they imply application, industry, and perseverance in all, that aspire to bliss.

Nor think, brethren, it is exacting too much. For know that all the labours, all the sufferings of the present life bear no proportion to the future glory of the blessed. Happy adversity! valuable crosses! that will *work for us above measure an exceeding weight of glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 17. Vain joys! empty vanities! which this transitory world affords. But be glad, says Christ, that your names are written in heaven; nor set any bounds to your joy, when you think of the magnitude of the recompense, which there awaits you.

If eternal life then, Christians, be proposed to us as a thing we may buy, is it not in our power to obtain it? Yes, dear people; howsoever indigent you may be, you have still enough to purchase it. The exact value of it is all that you are, and nothing less. If you be willing to buy it, then make no reserve; nor tell us for excuse that you have nothing good within you, inasmuch as you are sinners: in giving yourselves for it, you become good. This is the price the Saints gave for it, and for which they now possess it. They are the industrious labourers, that bore the heat of the day and the toil. They are the prudent stewards, that made interest of their master's talents. It cost them indeed their sweat, exertions, combats; but they sacrificed every thing to their supreme happiness with pleasure. Were they mistaken, or are we? Does the gospel deceive us, or do we delude ourselves? O Lord! what dost thou mean by announcing these things to us, unless to inform us of our duty? Or what does mankind pretend to, by disregarding them?

To conclude, my friends, let us excite ourselves to the attainment of this heavenly bliss. Happy immortality! thou shalt henceforth possess our whole esteem, all our desires. We will no more look at heaven without saying; there is our country; there our eternal abode; there we shall one day fix our tabernacle; there we shall have nothing to dread from sin or its consequences; there will be

be the end of all our evils, and the commencement of all our good ; there we shall console ourselves with that reflection of St. Paul, that *we shall be always with the Lord.* 1 Thes. iv. 16. What shall we then fear ? Will it be our demerits ? We shall be crowned by Jesus Christ. Will it be death ? We shall live with Jesus Christ. O God ! what a life ! a life that cannot but be cheap at any expense whatever. Yes, brethren, let us hope firmly ; but let us hope in Christ and through Christ, that he will hereafter bring us to the foot of his throne, where we may possess him for ever, who is our sovereign and only good. Amen.

T H E

T H E

FOURTH SUNDAY after EASTER.

On the Necessity of Repentance.

He will convince the World of Sin, and of Justice, and of Judgment. John xvi. 8.

WE need but know what man is, to comprehend the dangers, with which he is surrounded on every side: and we need but be acquainted with those dangers to be satisfied that he is liable, each moment, to be involved in inextricable calamities. Vice attacks him on all quarters, and every-thing within him affords it an opportunity. Born in sin, as the spirit of God tells him, the natural aversion he feels to any good, and that violent propensity, which inclines him to all evil, are sufficient to make him sensible of his deplorable situation. Grace comes in to his assistance; but grace does not render him impeccable; he still finds within himself a weakness, that accompanies him to the grave, where he knows that *justice* and *judgment* are expecting him. In these alarming circumstances, what would become of him did not repentance supply him with a ray of hope, amidst the irregularities into which he is daily falling? Might he not, with reason, apprehend being excluded from that felicity, that eternal possession of his God, for which alone he was created, did not the virtue of penance stretch forth a friendly hand to his support? Penance therefore, brethren, is wholly necessary, to all that may have deviated from the path of righteousness; as I will here endeavour to convince you; after having implored the help of the enlightening

enlightening Spirit, whom our Saviour here mentions, as our Sovereign Director.

In the whole system of morality, there is no one matter more important than this of repentance, since it is the basis and foundation of Christian piety: notwithstanding which, there is scarce a subject, that we are less willing to hear mentioned. But to-day, my friends, regarding only your welfare and your wants, I undertake to make you sensible of the necessity of repentance; first, from the Scriptures; secondly, from the holy Fathers; thirdly, from the Councils; and lastly, from reason itself.

The Son of God has declared this necessity in terms so clear, so formal, and so explicit, as to preclude every possibility of a doubt. *Unless you repent, he says, you shall perish.* Luke xiii. 3. And to enforce the impression on us yet more strongly; in the same discourse, within a breath almost he repeats, *unless you do penance you shall all perish.* This, I think, can want no comment, brethren.

Suppose a person, who had spent his days in solitude, and in the practice of the most eminent sanctity, should by the order of heaven rise up among us, to announce the word of God. With what avidity should we flock to hear him? With how nice a punctuality should we put in execution the pious lessons we might have received from his mouth? Behold then, brethren, St. John the Baptist comes forth from his desert; after having been foretold by the Prophets, conceived by a miracle, sanctified in his mother's womb, and noted, thirty years for the greatest austerity of life: he brings with him the commission of heaven, to enlighten us in the science of the Saints: If ever an exhortation can be important, his must be so; and what at last is it? but *do penance? bring forth fruits worthy of penance.* Luke iii. viii. 3.

Our divine Saviour himself blushes not to open his mission with the same theme, although it had been so often repeated by his Precursor. And that no room might be left to suppose that he only preached up repentance, in order to prepare the people for the great work he came to accomplish; after his resurrection, when all his sacred mysteries had received their final complement, he again charges his Apostles to inculcate repentance universally. In consequence of which St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, cries out, *do penance*; Acts ii. 28; and St. Paul, in the presence of the senate at Athens, says, that *God now declareth to men, that all should do penance*; Acts xvii. 30. And to prevent us from thinking, Christians, that this command regards only such, as are not regenerated; the same Redeemer, on his throne of glory, expresses himself in a similar manner to the bishops of Sardis and Laodicea; *do penance*: Apoc. ii. 5. threatening them with reprobation, on their refusal to comply.

Hence St. Thomas takes occasion to establish this theological maxim, that actual mortal sin cannot be remitted without repentance. A mortal sin, he says, may be done away without the Eucharist, without absolution, without the medium, in fine, of any sacrament,

sacrament, if necessity so requires : but it neither has, nor can be forgiven without repentance, either actual or virtual. You then, my dear people ; such I mean among you as have lost your baptismal innocence, seek no other way of returning to God than this, which alone can bring you to him.

According to Tertullian, it is a standing rule with the Deity, never to grant the pardon of our sins gratuitously and without expence. It is his will that we should purchase it with the coin of repentance ; and as it is customary with the tradesman to examine the money offered to him before he parts with his goods ; so does God, says this Father, weigh and ponder our repentance, to see that it be sterling ; before he will put into our hands his grace, which is the seed of eternal life.

But if any thing be wanting to convince you, Christians, of the opinion of Divines on this head, let the common voice of the Church, assembled in a body, speak for all of them.

The council of Trent, one of the most numerous, as well as the most illustrious of the ecclesiastical conventions Religion has witnessed, says positively ; “ repentance always was necessary, (i. e. at all times, whether under the law of Nature, the law of Moses, or the law of Grace,) to such as had fallen into mortal sin, to recover the grace and justice of God ; even to them, that had petitioned to be baptized.”

The reasons, on which the Scriptures and the Fathers establish this necessity, are founded both on the nature of God, and that of man. For in the first place, I say, my friends, if we do not repent, after having sinned, we outrageously insult the Majesty of the Lord, which is one of his brightest attributes. If any one affronts us, or does us any sensible injury ; if he shews no kind of sorrow ; if he passes and repasses us without testifying his regret, or offering some excuse, how exceedingly, in our ideas, does such a behaviour add to his offence ? how grossly does it inflame and aggravate his supposed guilt ? We stand convicted of high treason against God, and yet are not solicitous about it. We have grievously offended the King of Kings, who is always, not only near, but within us ; *in whom we live, move and exist* ; and still we play, sing, and laugh, and appear in the different scenes of life, with as much gaiety and glee, as if nothing was amiss. How great an insensibility, my brethren ! What an outrageous contempt of the sovereign Majesty of the Deity ! The Emperor Nero, put the great Philosopher Seneca to death, for no other reason than that having already been disgraced, he took the matter lightly, and appeared unhurt at his being out of favour. And the Scripture justly censures the insensibility of Jacob's children, who having displeased the Lord highly, by their unnatural treatment of their brother Joseph, went to feasting nevertheless, as if nothing had happened. This contempt of his supreme Majesty ; this refusal to repent, after having offended him, is more atrocious, says St. Chrysostom, in the eyes of God, than the very sin. He himself

himself complains of it by his Prophet Jeremy. *There is no one, he says, that doth penance for his sin*; but every guilty person exclaims, *what have I done then?* Jer. viii. 6.

In the second place, by postponing our repentance, we insult the almighty Justice, we scorn its threats, and defy its judgments. *There is no alteration in them, says the Psalmist; Ps. xlv. 22. they have not feared God; he hath stretched forth his hand to repay.* Yes, Christians, the arm of his justice is already bared, to avenge the cause of his mercy, which you have so long slighted. It admonishes you to forsake your iniquitous doings and repent, at the peril of otherwise crushing you with its whole weight. Still you remain immoveable and hardened as the rock; you continue your pursuit of vice; you spurn at every thought that would prevail upon you to stop and appease God's anger. And what is all this but to make a scorn of him, and set his menaces at defiance?

Lastly, we affront his immensity; by harbouring in our bosoms an object that is infinitely offensive to him; for there is nothing so odious, so detestable, so execrable in his sight as sin. Perhaps you will say, however, we may possibly never more be guilty of it. But you have been so already, and you do not repent; until you do, this hateful monster must always stalk before his eyes; since his nature, the ubiquity of his essence, obliges him to be ever present in the centre of our souls, which are become his utter aversion, by our former sin, even allowing that first sin should also chance to be our last. But it is more than probable, that if you neglect to be converted, brethren, you will repeat it with the aggravation of accumulated ingratitude.

For abyss, says David, calleth on abyss; and crime, we may add, on crime; since the fault which is not cancelled by a speedy repentance, must naturally sink us deeper by its pressure. Sin removes us from God, and God from us; by which means it deprives us of his grace, obscures the understanding, depraves the will, inflames concupiscence, and roots us, by imperceptible degrees, in habits that become dangerous, in proportion to their being confirmed by frequent relapses.

But supposing even you should fall no more, my friends; on account of your past crimes, you are already involved in a state of sin; i. e. you are on the brink of damnation, the slender thread of a brittle life being the only separation between you and hell. How frequently do we hear of sudden deaths; deaths, that are no less untimely, than unlooked for? and with how much unconcern too and indifference do we hear of them? Whereas, abstracting from every other danger, the sole neglect of repentance is a dreadful, a certain, an inevitable peril; since the sacred mouth of Christ himself assures us, that *the Son of Man will come at an hour when we do not think of him.* Luke xii. 40.

Add to this, dear people, that by persevering in sin, and refusing to repent, we deprive ourselves of all the fruit of the good works,

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we may have done ; and may then, with reason, apply these words of St. Peter to ourselves ; *we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing.* Luke v. 5. You perform many good actions, Christians ; you are charitable to your neighbours ; you are diligent in attending the service of the Church, &c. although in our circumstances, it is not always easy so to do ; you take care that your children follow your example : all this is highly commendable, and might be of great service towards gaining heaven ; but for want of being in such dispositions, as are requisite to stamp a due value on these works, they are all lost, says St. Augustine : because to persist in sin, and neglect to expiate it by repentance, is to be at enmity with God, and of consequence to labour at salvation to no purpose.

And here I confess, brethren, I cannot too much lament the strange blindness of such, as having offended their Maker grievously, content themselves with going to the confessional, there to make a cold and unaffected narration of their guilt ; but take no care to purify themselves by the laborious exercises of a true repentance. What can your expectations be, might I here say to them ? You know there are but two ways to escape eternal ruin, innocence and repentance : you have forfeited the former ; how then can you refuse the mediation of the latter ?

Are you more enlightened than the Wiseman, who tells us that *unless we repent, we shall fall into the hands of God ?* Eccus. ii. 22.

Are you more sure of your salvation than St. Paul, who, writing to the Corinthians, says ; *I chastise my body and bring it into subjection ; lest, while I preach to others, I myself become a reprobate ;* 1 Cor. xi. 27.

Are you more sanctified than the bishop of Ephesus, whom Christ commends in the Apocalypse : yet, because he had suffered the ardour of his charity, to cool, he is ordered to repent immediately, on pain of being abandoned to the darkness of incredulity ?

Are you more innocent than St. Chrysostom, who speaks to his people as follows : I have great reason indeed to be dubious of my safety, and to apprehend damnation myself ; since, obligated as I am to bewail your faults, I have neither time nor tears sufficient left to deplore my own ?

Are you more holy than St. Macarius, that Patriarch, as I may call him of many renowned penitents ; who, being about to give them a discourse one day, instead of haranguing them, as they expected, burst into tears ; till at length his disciples expressing their concern at it, let us weep, my brethren, he replied, let us weep in time, that we may not be compelled to weep throughout eternity ?

From all this, Christians, one of these two inferences must be drawn : either that the Saints were extremely weak, to permit themselves to be imposed upon by imaginary terrors, and blinded by groundless fears to the infinity of the divine mercy : or that we are insensible in a superlative degree, to be beyond the reach of apprehension,

hension, in such circumstances as have made so many wise and holy persons tremble with dread and horror.

But weigh the matter well, my friends, and be not shocked at the pale, austere and mortified countenance of repentance. If she be an object of aversion to a pampered body, she is highly pleasing to the feelings of a distressed soul, which she alone can emancipate from the fetters of sin, and the tyranny of Satan. What if pain and sufferings be her attendants ; they are but temporary companions ; only employed to prepare the inward house for the comfort of an eased conscience, the participation of God's favours, a confidence in his mercies, and a restoration to the dignity of his children.

Listen then, dear people, to his herald St. Paul : attend to what he tells you in the acts of the Apostles ; *God declareth now to men that they all do penance* ; Acts. xvii. 30 ; and ponder each word. *God declareth.* Yes, Christians, it is he himself ; he, who is the party injured ; who *has no need of your goods*, but of whom you are perpetually in want. It is he, that vouchsafes to be beforehand with you, to be the first to invite you to a reconciliation and renewal of friendship. How astonishing his goodness !

God declareth to men, not to the infernal spirits. Was he to shew them the like mercy, to offer such a favour to them, to indulge them with a small portion of time and grace, how would they improve it ? So many hours, weeks, and even years are allowed to you ; so many lights, graces, and inspirations granted to you ; and you abuse them all. *For us men*, says the Creed of Nice, and *for our salvation he came down from heaven* ; yet we despise his inestimable treasures, the riches of his bounty, which we frustrate and pervert by our obstinacy in guilt.

That they all do penance : all without exception. Repent then, brethren. Labour seriously to acquire a hatred, a detestation, a horror of sin. Consider yourselves as most wretched for having ever committed it ; nourish the most heart-felt grief for your misfortune, and be sincerely determined rather to forfeit property, honour, health, and life itself, if necessary, than evermore be guilty of it. Resolve to do your utmost to make satisfaction to the divine Justice, and repair its injured honour ; to submit with patience, and even joy, to whatever may happen contrary to your inclinations, which have so often militated against the adorable will of your God ; to perform every good work you can, in order to pacify him ; to fast, pray, and mortify yourselves, as far as your situation will admit, and to refrain from many lawful and innocent diversions, with a view to make atonement for the numberless illicit and criminal actions, you stand convicted of.

Lastly, *now God declareth*, says St. Paul. Do penance therefore whilst in your power, dear people ; perhaps hitherto you have not done it properly ; and as for the future, you very possibly may never again have the opportunity of doing it so well. Who knows but some of your past confessions may be invalid, either from the defect of that true sorrow, which God demands ; from the want of a sincere dis-
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position to amend your life, and avoid the occasions of your sins; from your not having pardoned your enemies; not restored the property or character of an injured neighbour: not paid a due attention to the examination of your conscience; not discovered fully all your crimes, whether from fear, shame, or ignorance?

Your doom, my friends, may be like to that of a certain Catechumen; of whom we read, that having postponed the baptismal rites, with a design to continue in his course of wickedness a little longer without interruption, he was surprised by the stroke of death, as he was passing through a wild and lonesome forest, on a journey. Another person, whom providence had directed into the same path, overheard his cries, and running to his assistance, although too late, heard him call upon the very trees and mountains to baptize him. But no, there was no baptism for him. Tremble, I say, lest your fate be similar. Some of these days, you may be summoned by an unexpected call of death; then you will cry out for confession; but no; there may be no means of confession for you.

And when you shall have quitted the stage under these distressful circumstances, your friends may say; why had we not the charity to admonish him? perhaps he might have listened to us, and, by a timely repentance, have prevented his wretched fate. But remember, brethren, that the Son of God admonished him long since; telling him he would come when he should not be expected. The ministers of the Lord frequently admonished him; crying out to all, as I now do; *you know not the day nor the hour*. The repeated examples of sudden deaths, almost daily before his eyes, admonished him, by the forebodings of his misfortune, which they so often gave him.

Nor say, dear Christians; there is no hurry, there is nothing presses you to repentance. For what can urge it more forcibly, than the will of heaven, which to-day you have heard announced to you by St. John the Baptist, by the Apostles, by the Doctors, by the councils of the Church, and finally, by the sacred oracle of Christ himself? What can press it more powerfully, than the charity of this same Jesus, who became incarnate to invite you to it, and who, by an excess of his infinite mercy, has so long and so patiently waited for you. Perhaps the opportunity, which now offers, may never more occur. Ere long, death must overtake you, and judgment follow upon its heels. In that alarming day, if you shall have repented, and done complete penance for your sins, you will be secure from fear and danger, and received into the company of the predestinated in heaven; to which I entreat the Sovereign Being to conduct you in his infinite goodness. Amen.

T H E

FIFTH SUNDAY after EASTER.

On the Delay of Repentance.

Beho'd, now thou speakest plainly. John xvi. 29.

IF there be any subject, on which our divine Redeemer *speaks so plainly*, that his words cannot be misconstrued, it is that of our immediate repentance, and being in readiness to answer his summons. Whence the devout St. Bernard, commenting on those words of the Canticle, *the flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come*, Cant. ii. 12. says, that the vines, so often mentioned in the inspired writings, represent the state of a Christian soul: that we trim these vines, when, by the pruning knife of repentance, we lop off our imperfections, and remove those vices that are likely to obstruct the fruit of our good works. But he remarks, that the Spouse says, *the time of pruning is come*: inasmuch as repentance, to be available, must be undertaken at a proper season. Now, the present is the most seasonable hour, as God informs us by St. Paul: *behold! now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.* 2 Cor. vi. 2. This therefore is the time, which it behoves us to choose and to manage with the utmost carefulness; taking for our model the example of this great Apostle; who no sooner was made acquainted with the will of heaven in his regard, than he readily gave into it; and, from a bloody-minded persecutor, became a meek disciple of the humble Jesus. That we may imitate his promptitude in renouncing
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our evil ways, let us call in the divine assistance, by a short address to the throne of mercy.

Little good is to be expected from telling the thoughtless Christian that he must repent; that the necessity of forsaking his vicious habits, by a sincere conversion, is absolute and indispensable; he knows it; nay, he is assured of it, if he gives but credit to the gospel. The only question with him is, when to set about this work. He will tell you it is as yet an early hour; that there is no hurry; and that when he shall have perfected the schemes, which his interest or pleasure may have put him on, then will be the time for him to turn his thoughts that way. In opposition to this doctrine, I will here endeavour to convince you, brethren, that if you consider your salvation as a matter of any moment, you must apply your whole attention to it without delay: this I say, I will endeavour to prove by the subsequent reasons. In the first place, because the deferred repentance, with which you amuse yourselves, must be uncertain; in the second place, because it will be still more difficult to accomplish than it is at present; and in the last, because it cannot fail to be less advantageous to your souls.

That a procrastinated repentance must be uncertain is evident, from the precarious tenure of our lives. Death, says the moral philosopher Seneca, calls upon us to deliver up our trust, not our lease. The difference between the two is this: In a lease, the person to whom such a grant is made, becomes master for a certain term; be that term seven, fourteen, or more years, according to the wording of it. What he rents is unalienably his till the expiration of the time appointed. On the other hand, a trust is a thing deposited with us, and committed to our care, during the pleasure of him that confides it to us, and always revocable at his will. In this regard then, Christians, I appeal to yourselves, and to your own feelings. Is there any one among you, who considers his life as made over to him for a term certain? If there be, let him but reflect on the grief, he may perchance have experienced, on the loss of some dear, departed friend. That friend, that brother, that parent, whose loss he now deplores, what would he not have sacrificed to have been able to preserve? but alas! in vain. The God that made, has already called for him. In spite of our tears, he has demanded of him that vital spirit, with which he had intrusted him. Our lives are not our own then. No, my brethren, they are not at our disposal. The Deity alone is the sovereign Lord of life and death, which he distributes at his pleasure; and as he first gave us this mortal existence without our approbation, so will he recall it without our consent.

But you will say, perhaps, dear people, that you mean to be converted, when the projects, in which you are engaged, shall be ripened, when your families shall be provided for, and when the rest of the concerns, that engross your present thoughts, shall be brought to a state of maturity. This would be all very reasonable, were
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you the masters of your lives. But your Saviour tells you, that *it is not your business to know the times nor the moments, which the Father hath put it into his own power.* Acts i. 7. If it is not for you to know them, certainly much less can it be your province to dispose of them. Harken to St. Augustine; "the God, he says, who has promised the pardon of sin to a true conversion, has not promised to afford the time for that conversion." On the contrary, he has given us repeated assurances, in his Gospel, that he will come, when we least expect him: and to take from us every shadow of excuse in this regard, he adds (a thing he was no ways accustomed to do in his exhortations on other matters :) *What I say to you, I say to all; watch and be prepared.* Mark xiii. 27. But the misfortune is, we are more inclined to imitate the tyrant, of whom profane history gives us the following account.

It relates, that a person, whose name was Archias, a powerful citizen of Athens, having contrived, by intrigue and artifice, to enslave his devoted country, and by imperceptible degrees to fix the diadem on his own unworthy brows; the nobility of that renowned city, nurtured under the wings of liberty, conspired at once to throw off the odious yoke, and wash their polluted crown in the blood of its defiler. Accordingly, they have recourse to a person named Phillidas, a pretended friend to the usurper; who agrees to invite him to a supper, to admit them into his house, and to secrete them in a room, whence they might in safety rush in upon and murder him. Their conspiracy however was not so religiously concealed, but it reached the ears of a real well-wisher to the tyrant, and that on the very day destined for the execution of the plot. This friend of his instantly dispatches a messenger to Archias, who was already sat down to table, to give him notice of their designs; at the same time sending him a letter, that contained an account of the whole affair. The servant, being introduced into his presence, delivers the letter, intimating to him the petition of his master, that he would be pleased to peruse it: return, says the King, and thank your master from me; as to the letter, I will read it when I have leisure. But, Sire, replies the messenger; I am commissioned earnestly to entreat, that you would deign to run it over instantly, as its contents are of the utmost consequence. What! says the tyrant, does it contain business of importance? If it does, this is not a proper time; I shall not interrupt my pleasures; I will leave things of importance till to-morrow; and upon this he puts the letter in his pocket, without so much as opening it. The result of which is, that after the pause of a few minutes, the conspirators, at a signal previously concerted, rush from the place of their concealment, fall upon the king in the midst of his festivity, and immediately assassinate him. What think you, Christians, of the stupidity and obstinacy of this tyrant? but apply the story to yourselves.

In regard to our Creator, we all of us have acted the usurper's part ; i. e. by our offences and crimes we have abused his infinite goodness. Like the serpent, that wounds the fostering hand, whose warmth restored it to existence, we, my brethren, too often, alas ! have turned on that creative hand, which gave us birth ; that beneficent hand, to which we owe all we have or are ; that affectionate hand, which, with parental tenderness, conducts us from the dawn to the eve of life. But beware, dear people ; a conspiracy is formed against you ; those fifty or sixty years, that have silvered your heads ; that weakness of stomach so long complained of ; that rheumatism, that gout so often struggled with, are so many assassins, bent upon destroying you. In the mean time, the Son of God, your truest friend, sends you a letter to inform you of your danger ; that spiritual book, which lies mouldering on your shelf, is the epistle ; the messenger, dispatched to advertize you, is the preacher exhorting you on the part of God, as I now do, to view the peril, and attend to your salvation. If, like the tyrant, you return for answer that the business is of too serious a nature to be discussed to-day, and tell me, with him, that you will leave affairs of such importance till to-morrow, take the consequences on yourselves : if you be eternally lost, the blame cannot be charged upon your friend, who gives you this timely notice ; *what I say to you, I say to all ; watch.*

But let us suppose, brethren, that nothing of what I have been predicting should ever happen ; and that, so far from being in danger of dying suddenly, you could even produce letters of protection from the Almighty himself ; letters exempting you from the payment of the common debt of nature till any given time, a hundred years hence, if you please : then, you say, we will repent, and make our peace with God. Still you will not, I tell you, if such be your principles ; and that for a second reason, which is this ; because the difficulties, that impede your return to virtue at present, will then be much increased, both in point of number and of prevalence.

These difficulties, in the first place, are the effects of your being abandoned by God, in consequence of your having previously abandoned him. Your sins, says the prophet, have made a separation between you and your Maker. The graces, he gives you, wherewith to combat vice, are not so strong, so powerful, no nor yet so numerous as those, he grants to many others. Your offences have rendered you unworthy of them ; *mine, he says, is revenge, that their feet may slide.* Deut. xxxii. 35. What can you expect then, Christians, but that, as your perseverance in guilt augments the number of your crimes, so it will add to the number of the divine judgments ? *You treasure up wrath against yourselves.* Rom. ii. 5.

Secondly, dear people, these difficulties will proceed from the devil, to whom it is the property of vice to bind and chain us, so to speak. If the twelve or twenty mortal sins, you stand charged with already, have given this malignant spirit any power over you,

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must not that power be much increased by the addition of a hundred or two more? Will not his fetters be thereby far more strongly rivetted; and his tyranny confirmed?

The third and last cause of these said difficulties, brethren, will be our own bad inclinations and sinful habits. Although our enemy should decline tempting us; although no other hinderances should obstruct our conversion, than those which we ourselves throw in its way, still these alone would suffice to render it not only hard, but even impracticable almost.

Are you not sensible, my friends, of the bent you take by deferring your repentance? Do you not see that you thereby form a habit, which naturalizes sin to you, as I may say? I might here apply to each of your professions, for a simile in the various branches of your business, to make myself understood: but in short, Christians, be your professions whatever they may, only weigh the following reasons, and I shall need no further illustration. If you cannot master your propensity to evil at present, how shall you be able to conquer it hereafter, when confirmed by the second nature produced from custom? If you are unequal to the task of repressing your passion, when it is but a lion's whelp; how shall you overcome it, when a lion grown? If you are incapable of rooting up your predominant vice, while yet a shrub; what shall enable you to do it, when become a tree? If you cannot cross the stream, whilst it is but small; how shall you pass over it, when augmented to a torrent? If it be above your power to extinguish the spark; how much more so, when spread to a conflagration? If you cannot break the bonds of sin, when no stronger than pack-thread; how shall you be able to burst them, when become forcible as chains of adamant? *With the bonds of his sins shall the sinner be confined.*

To convince a person obstinately attached to his own opinion, it may be sometimes proper to make concessions, which, in arguing with one of greater candour, it would be no ways requisite to do. Wherefore, dear people, I will now suppose the sinner to live to an extreme old age; to be superior to all the difficulties, that stand in the way of his repentance; and finally, to become, in every sense, a true convert. All this, I say, I will suppose for a while. But in this case even, let me desire him to speak his real sentiments in regard to that important, that precious, that inestimable treasure, time, which he has wasted so unprofitably, in the delay of his conversion. Has he forgot the council of the Wise man? *go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and learn wisdom; which provideth meat for herself in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.* Prov. vi. 6. Is he ignorant of the advice of his Saviour, who tells him to work while it is day-light, *for the night cometh, when no one can work?* or of the exhortation of St. Paul, *to do good while we have time?* Gal. vi. 10. The course of our mortal life is the time to make a provision for futurity; this is the day of labour, this the season of merit. The good actions, that we perform in

a state of grace, are so many seeds of endless happiness, says St. Bernard ; they will produce us honours, riches, and delights throughout the vast extent of a boundless eternity. How strangely then, my brethren, do we act against our own interest, when we postpone our repentance, and continue to follow the ways of sin ?

Here, Christians, let us indulge a supposition, which certainly might fall within the limits of possibility. Let us imagine that at the capture of an enemy's town, whilst others gallantly storm the breach, and spread far and near in quest of booty, a friend of ours should amuse himself with cards, or some such trifling occupation, in his tent. At his return home ; here, he says, I am, thank God ; safe and unhurt ; neither bruised nor wounded ; and, if I am no gainer by this expedition, this at least I have to console me, that I have suffered nothing from it. What would you say to such a person ? Away coward ! hide thyself : with what assurance canst thou appear in public ? or support the shame of seeing thy companions crowned with laurels, and laden with the riches, which their bravery has acquired ; whilst thou, by thy timidity or love of pleasure, hast turned thy back upon such a favourable opportunity of making thy fortune ? You, my friends, are guilty of an equal, nay, of a far more notorious folly. Those chosen souls, your companions, who, retiring from the world, have devoted themselves to the service of virtue, are eagerly employed in hoarding up eternal treasures ; whilst you, neglectful of futurity and mindful of the present only, lavish in amusements or useless toil those invaluable moments ; each of which, with proper management, would suffice to purchase a crown of never-fading lustre for you. Your youth, the flower of your years, too generally is given to the devil ; while nothing is reserved for the Deity but the dregs of life, the uncertain and feeble remains of debilitated age.

In the old law God required that the sacrifices, offered to him, should consist of the finest, the best, and the most perfect of such animals, as he had selected for that purpose. Will he then be satisfied, think you, with the sacrifice of the wasted, useless, pining days of man ? Or can it be expected that such an offering should obtain his blessing ?

The great St. Augustine, brethren, was once in a situation similar to yours. He tells us, in the book of his confessions, that he had been deeply buried in the mire of sin, and of those corrupt habits, to which custom had inured him. At length however, convinced of his wretched state by the cogent inspirations of the holy Ghost, he knew not what to reply ; but, like a person awakened suddenly out of a profound sleep, *presently*, he answers, *by and by*, another turn and I will arise. Behold your own case, dear Christians ; you know the state of your souls ; you must be conscious that a continuance in the road, you are now in, will lead you infallibly to perdition ; you are convinced ; and in consequence of your conviction, you at least purpose to amend ; but still you add, *presently*, *by and by*, another day and I will be converted. How long, exclaims this Saint, shall I
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continue to say *to-morrow*? Why not to-day, why not this instant put an end to my irregularities? The same I reply to you, dear people: why are you for deferring? why not desist from the pursuit of vice immediately, this very moment, this sole portion of time, that you can truly call your own? how many have you seen cut off in the prime of life, without having been allowed the smallest leisure to put in execution their projected scheme of reformation? The like misfortune may befall you.

But listen and be persuaded. Act like this illustrious convert, who, amidst the serious thoughts that reflection obtruded on him, heard a voice saying to him, *open and read*: he opened the book accordingly, that lay before him; where the passage, that first caught his eye, was the following; *not in riot and drunkenness, not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.* Rom. xiii. 13. *Open and read*, I cry out to you, my friends; *open* the Sinner's Guide, Dr. Challoner's Meditations, or any spiritual book, you may chance to have: you will there meet with the same doctrine, although delivered in other words: you will there see that the content of your hearts, the peace of your minds, the salvation of your souls consist not in acts of ebriety, impurity and the like, but in dedicating your whole being to the service of your Maker, and in loving him alone. Turn yourselves then, to him, dear Christians, I entreat you; and resolve to begin, from this very day, to extirpate all evil habits, and every affection, that chains you to sin and creatures. You will soon experience the happy fruits of your repentance. You will quickly find yourselves eased of the heavy burthen, that oppresses you; and freed from the galling yoke, under which you have groaned so long: when, in joy at the recovery of your liberty, you will sing as St. Augustine did on his conversion, *Thou, O Lord! hast broken my bonds; to thee I will sacrifice a victim of praise.* Ps. cxv. Which I beseech him to grant we all may, both in this life and in the next. Amen.

T H E
SIXTH SUNDAY after EASTER.

On Final Impenitence.

*These Things I have told you, that when the Hour shall come,
you may remember that I told you of them.*

John xvi. 14.

THE words, which our Redeemer here makes use of to warn his disciples of the difficulties they would have to encounter after his death, I make use of to you, my dear people, to apprise you of the danger that threatens such of you as continue obstinate in your sins. I have frequently admonished you of the necessity of repentance, and endeavoured to convince you how indispensable it is. But I now go further, and tell you with our divine Saviour, that, if you obstinately shut your ears to the voice of God, who calls you ; if you harden your hearts, and will not regard him, when he assures you, that *unless you do penance, you shall perish*. Luke xiii. 3. *You shall die in your sin*. John viii. 21. A frightful sentence this, it is certain ; and I mention it, that, *when the hour shall come, you may remember that I told you of it, and discharged my duty fully*. Tremendous danger of a death-bed repentance ! This I will here unfold, my friends ; and to set it in a proper light, I say first, that he, who defers his conversion during the time of life, will hardly have it in his power at death ; and secondly, I will expose the idle pretences, to which the sinner trusts, in order to confirm himself in his impenitence ; beginning this momentous business by imploring the assistance of the heavenly Spirit.

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When I tell you, Christians, that the person, who refuses to repent during his life, has every reason to fear he shall not be able to do it at his death, I do not pretend by this to set bounds to the divine mercy, and assert positively that no sinner is converted in his last moments. I know the grace of Christ infinitely surpasses the malice of the most abandoned : but the point in question is whether, if having deferred your repentance in your life-time, you have any reason to hope to die in God's peace. Now, I say that, so far from being certain you will repent sincerely, it is no ways probable ; and this for the following reasons.

First, it is a truth confirmed by the testimony of every age, a truth you have a thousand times heard, and which is even proverbial among us, that as we live, so we die. To deny this truth would be to contradict yourselves, and to trample on common sense, in favour of your prepossessions. Yet this, my brethren, is the part such of you act, as harden yourselves, and expect that, after living only to vice, after giving a loose to every kind of wickedness, you shall die like Saints. But be candid, Christians, and I desire nothing further of you. Are there any hopes that what you promise yourselves will happen ? Is it probable you will die well, after having lived so ill ? What can there be less plausible and less worthy of credit, than an opinion, that contradicts the universal ideas of mankind ? For if St. Augustine thinks it hardly possible that the person, who has led a virtuous life, can make an unhappy end ; I hence infer against you, or rather against such of you as lead unchristian lives, that, far from being sure, it is not even likely that he, whose life has been disorderly, will die in the arms of virtue.

The second reason, which I bring of the uncertainty of your conversion at the hour of death, is that, when you say so coolly that you will repent in your last moments, you do not understand the nature of this virtue. Learn it from St. Augustine then. As sin, says this Father, produces two great evils in the heart of man, the neglect of his Creator, and a criminal adherence to the creature ; repentance, on the contrary, to be genuine, must draw him back again to God, and make him detest whatever had allured him from him : where either of these is wanting, there is no true repentance : Without the love of the Deity, at least in some proportion, it is false ; without the hatred of sin, it is ineffectual. But is all this, I ask, so easy for a man, who never loved God sincerely, and whose heart was never, in fact, detached from vice ? Besides, for repentance to be of any avail, we must be sorry for our crimes from a supernatural motive, i. e. for God's sake, and not merely for our own interest. Now, how shall the man, who never had a view beyond himself, soar above himself so suddenly, and make internal acts ? Is it probable that our sentiments and affections should be so altered in an instant ? When you are in health, you say, that a good confession is sufficient to save the greatest miscreant. I say so likewise. But what perhaps appears

a very easy matter to you, the more I consider it, the more it strikes me as the most difficult of all things.

Thirdly, let us suppose however that the sinner, of whom I am speaking, be sincerely determined on his conversion ; it remains to know whether he will have the leisure. What ! did the Almighty ever promise to afford him a proper time for his return ? How many have you seen cut off in the very flower of their age, some by one accident, some by another ? How many have you heard of, that have died suddenly, without assistance ? and may I not add, without repentance too ? Now, who among you is so far acquainted with the divine counsels, as to be assured that his fate will not be similar ? May not some of those tragical ends, that have so often alarmed you for others, be your case to-morrow, to-day, or perhaps this very hour ?

How great, then, is your insensibility, my friends ? Is this your way of acting, when you are upon making an agreement for the hire of a farm, or the like ? You then demand securities ; for there is no knowing what may happen, you say ; and thoughtless as you are, after taking every precaution for your temporal concerns, you risk the sole affair, than can interest you, that of eternity I mean, rashly and without scruple. And on what foundation ? on that presumptuous folly, that you shall have time enough at death for your conversion. Alas ! brethren, how many are there now in hell, who, like you, purposed to repent ; but who disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, without having begun even to put a hand to this great work ?

Fourthly, but I will suppose you, Christians, to be so happy as to have the time you expect. Shall you have that grace, which is requisite, to triumph in an instant over the corruption of your heart ? Whence must this grace come ? from God alone, the sovereign Lord of all his creatures ; who keeps the keys of life and death ; who chooses Jacob, and rejects Esau ; who accepts the presents of Abel, and refuses those of Cain.

It is an article of our faith then that a good death is a gift entirely gratuitous, which it is no more in our power to merit than the grace, for instance, of vocation to Christianity ; so that to hope for a good death, as you do, is to hope for one of the greatest of all favours. And from whom do you expect it ? from God himself, whom you disregarded during life, and whom you never ceased to offend. What ! you shall have spent your days in the practice of every vice ; you shall have shut your ears to the inspirations of the Lord ; you shall have scorned his admonitions, his commands, his threats ; you shall have a thousand times trampled under foot the blood he shed for you ; and yet you will expect not only his favours, but the most signal of all his favours, a good death ; and that even when it is the purchase of a good life only. If you be founded in your hopes, on whom will he exert his vengeance ?

Fifthly, but on the supposition even that God should grant you both the time and grace for your conversion, a thousand obstacles will
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arise, that will prevent you from making use of them ; and on this point especially, Christians, I should be glad to make you sensible how improbable it is that a sinner, who has postponed it till then, will be converted at his death.

Obstacles, on the part of his passions. The more confirmed an evil habit is, the more difficult to break the ties. Now if in the time of health, the only excuse, you could allege for your behaviour was that you were so enslaved, as to be unable to get the mastery of your vices ; by what miracle will it be easier for you to conquer them at death, when you will be much weaker, and your passions far more powerful ?

How, dear people, shall I paint the obstacles you will then experience ? The pangs, the convulsions, the frightful deliriums of the sick man announce that his end is not far off. O unhappy sinner ! whom the impenitence of thy life threatens with impenitence at thy death ; how, amidst the pressure of such evils, shalt thou find time to think of thy conversion ?

But if he has any intervals of reason, what must his condition be, when he is told, like Ezechias, *put order to thy house, for thou shalt die* ? Isaiah xxxviii. 1. Your dissolution approaches, send for the Priest ; at this news a crowd of frightful thoughts pour in upon him ; restitution, the grave, the sovereign Judge, hell, eternity ; these and a variety of similar objects occur in a moment to his enfeebled imagination, and terrify him to such a degree, that he loses the little sense he had remaining. In the mean time the Priest arrives ; and in this confusion of ideas, the sinner makes his confession, receives absolution and gives up the ghost ; i. e. he performs all these things, without being sensible of what he is doing ; without knowing whether they, that surround him, be men or monsters ; whether it be the heat of the fever, or the fire of hell, that already begins to act upon him. Such is the frightful state of the obstinate offender in these awful moments.

Sixthly, and tell me not that you have seen some sinners make an exemplary and edifying end. I allow it may, and even does happen so sometimes ; but notwithstanding this, I am not the less disposed to think there is every reason to fear, and even that it is highly probable, that a bad life will be followed by a bad death. And why ? because no repentance is true and meritorious, but that which proceeds from a free and sincere heart ; now that of a sinner in his dying moments is almost always both forced and hypocritical.

I say *forced* : for, my friends, at that decisive hour, do you forsake your sins ? or rather do not your sins forsake you ? You say, I know, I will never more injure my neighbour ; I will renounce that occasion, which has so frequently led me into evil, &c. You abjure these things at present ; but is it not because your physician, and your friends tell you you are past recovery ? For speak the truth ; were you sure there was no such a place as hell, would not your sentiments be the same now, as they were in the time of health ? It is
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the fire of hell then only, that extorts from you these signs of repentance ; and consequently it is forced.

I say moreover that it is *hypocritical*, or insincere, when delayed to these last moments ; and I desire those among you, brethren, whom the Lord has visited with any serious illness, and who have happily recovered of it, to tell me what were their thoughts on receiving the last sacraments. In the height of their grief, were they cordially disposed to return to virtue ? Since their recovery, are they become more devout at their prayers, more chaste in their desires, more reserved in their conversation, than before ? What was your pretended reformation then ? and what will it be again in your last sickness ? You do well to say, that if the sinner be converted, God will accept his repentance. I know he will ; he has promised it ; but has he any where assured him that this shall be the case ? has he not said on the contrary, that *he shall die in sin* ? For observe, the whole difficulty consists in being sincerely converted. After a life, that has been but one continued scene of wickedness, this undoubtedly cannot be effected without an extraordinary assistance, and without a grace far more efficacious than that, which providence grants in its usual way. Whence I conclude it very probable that the offender, who has long lived in a habit of unlamented guilt, will die in a state of final impenitence. Let us next examine briefly on what he builds his confidence, and how frivolous are the grounds of his security.

Every sinner, that postpones his repentance until death, must establish his assurance on one of these three foundations : on the goodness of God, which he considers as a never failing resource ; on some examples of the sacred writings, that seem to favour his delay ; or on the almost general conduct of mankind ; who, after a life spent in vicious courses, are reclaimed, he sees, at death, and become penitents. Now give a little attention, brethren, and you yourselves shall acknowledge the futility of all these pretences.

I agree with you that God is good ; and that his mercy, according to the expression of the Psalmist, is above all his works : that he can, as you observe, give you the grace of conversion in the article of death. But although he can, have you any assurance that he will ? Do we not learn otherwise from the Gospel ? Christ does not say that you shall continue obstinate to the end ; that you shall neglect, or shall not have time to sue for pardon : but he declares on the contrary, *you shall seek me, and shall not find me* ; and foretells you that *you shall die in your sin*. John viii. 21. What is it you mean then, when you appeal to the sovereign power of God for the work of your conversion ? He can revive the dead : but which of you would rashly risk his life because God is able to restore it by a miracle ? How then, dare you, on this same confidence, to hazard your salvation, that ought to be incomparably more dear to you than life.

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For what do you pretend, when you say that *God is good*, and that, of course, you may make yourselves easy? If what you assert had any foundation, I might reply that the Deity is then possessed of an inordinate goodness, which does not act in concert with his justice. For if, in consequence of God's being good, the obstinate sinner be entitled to confirm himself in his impenitence, what must I think of that command of his, *to do good while we have time*? Gal. vi. 10. What must I say of that oracle of St. Paul, that, if we harden our hearts, *we treasure up wrath against ourselves*? Rom. ii. 5. *God is good*; but as good as you please in the sense you hint at; what would be your opinion of a king, or any superior, who in the distribution of his favours should pay no more attention to virtue than to vice, to obedience than to contempt? This, nevertheless, is what you judge of the Supreme Being, when you remain impenitent. Ah! if his goodness be such as you affect to wish it, renounce your faith, and say with the profligate, *there is no God*. Ps. xiii. 1. *God is good*; and is it not evident he is so, not to have crushed you at the instant of your revolt? *God is good*; but he if be *good*, he is also *just*; if he be just, he must pursue the sinner to the last, who insults him with such audacity: and of consequence there is nothing less admissible than your first excuse: let us pass on to the second therefore.

I am conscious there are Christians, who, to give a colour to their impenitence, ransack the holy Scriptures, to find examples, that may favour them. For my part, I discover nothing there but threats, that should make us all tremble: Saul rejected by God, for his disobedience: Antiochus reduced to pray without success, on account of his profanations. What shall I say of many other noted sinners, whose tragic histories the sacred oracles exhibit? But the example, that is apt to make the greatest impression, is that of the good thief. I confess, dear people, one must be exceedingly presumptuous to depend on such a grace, as his; and extremely audacious to promise to correspond as faithfully with that grace, as this celebrated convert.

For, my friends, and I will say no more than what is intelligible to every one, there is nothing in this example, that can have a tendency to make you easy. In consulting the Fathers on this subject, we must allow it to be an instance, that God was pleased to give, to teach us never to despair of the dying sinner, who affords some signs of repentance; and never to instil into him that fatal despondency, which leads to damnation. But at the same time, they all agree that it is the only example in the Scriptures, that can possibly, although with very little plausibility, give any encouragement to such a rash presumption.

To make you sensible of this, I need but draw the comparison. How great a degree of faith, humility, contrition, and the like, is visible in the thoughts and words of this holy penitent? He publishes aloud the innocence of Christ his master, in opposition to
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the blasphemies of his infamous accomplice: he confesses his crimes, and owns the justice of his sentence: he only conjures Jesus Christ to remember him, when he shall be entered into his kingdom. But if there be any one present, that dares to confide in this example, it is solely with a view to live on more quietly in his wickedness; in which he shall die the more assuredly, as his temerity is inexcusable. A thousand instances of sinners, that have been cut off in a state of impenitence do not alarm him; and the conversion of one single person suffices to embolden him. How gross a presumption! For observe it well: it cost the Son of God no more than a word to triumph over the errors of this thief; what resemblance then, do you find between him and you? Had he, like you, abused all the graces, all the mercies of the Lord? repeatedly profaned his sacraments, despised his menaces? Alas! The sole obstacle, perhaps, to his conversion had been a gross ignorance; whereas, you oppose to yours a determined malice, an incorrigible obstinacy. Candidly; is this the great example that encourages you, when admonished of the extreme risk you run, in deferring your repentance to the hour of death? and what can you conclude from it? but that, infinitely more guilty than this thief, you cannot, without the most ungrounded arrogance, expect the like miracle, as was worked in his favour, at that critical moment.

In fine, it remains for me to say a word or two upon a third delusion, which has no better foundation, than those I have mentioned. For one, you say, that is taken off suddenly, there are a thousand habitual sinners, that die happily, and with great edification, in their beds. I should be glad that what you affirm was true. But to speak sincerely, Christians; is this a reason to flatter yourselves that, after leading a life like theirs, you shall be blessed with a similar death? For let us only reason on the matter. Ought the multitude of those offenders, whose death appears so desirable, to inspire you with so much confidence? Was there ever a more edifying end than that of Antiochus, whose terrible example you cannot but be acquainted with? He owns the impiety of his life; he detests it, both by his words and by his tears; he gives every proof of his regret. Antiochus does all this; and what more have you seen done by those, at whose deaths you have been present? Antiochus however, says the Scripture, cannot obtain mercy: notwithstanding this fine shew of repentance, he is damned.

Encourage yourselves again then, brethren, by what you have seen happen among your acquaintance. Consider, if you dare, those superficial appearances of a true repentance, as indubitable proofs of their salvation: and, supported by such examples, say it is nothing so uncommon to die in grace, after having lived in sin! For my part, as a faithful pastor, I will tell you, in concert with all the Fathers, that, without ever despairing of God's mercy, you have reason, as well as myself, to shudder at such conversions; and that the Church has ever regarded them as suspicious, and almost always
ineffectual;

ineffectual : which entitles me to repeat, in the conclusion of this discourse, what I said at the beginning of it ; that in daily postponing your repentance, so far from being certain that you will be reclaimed at death, it is highly probable you never will.

Defer it then no longer, my dear friends : perhaps many of us are already on the verge of that awful night, in which there is no more good to be done, and in which we are threatened with not finding God, although we seek him. *Delay then, I say, no longer to be converted to the Lord.* Ecclus. v. 8. Set about your salvation in good earnest, and devote to it the little time you may have still left : *defer not from day to day.* ib. That these solemn truths may make a due impression on us, is what I devoutly wish. Amen.

T H E

FIRST SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Love of our Neighbour.

Be ye Merciful, as your Father also is Merciful. Luke vi. 36.

THE drift of this present Gospel, Christians, is to instil into us a spirit of charity, and to inspire us with the sentiments of an unbounded benevolence. Happy should I be, could I so promote its design, as henceforth to see you animated with one common soul.

Be merciful, says Christ. Alas! my friends, what is there disagreeable or repugnant in this commandment? Compassion towards our neighbour is a thing so natural to us, that Job is not afraid of exaggerating, when he says that this disposition is born with man, that it grows up and dies but with him. To engrave the impression more deeply, Christ here commands us to *be merciful*; as if he had said, compassionate by nature, let the dictates of religion also support you in that inbred principle; if, as men, inclination prompts you to commiserate your fellow-creatures, with how much more reason are you bound to love them as Christians? Baptism has made you my children, and at that instant mercy was born in you; cultivate it therefore, and bring it to maturity; for it is *mercy I call for, and not sacrifice*.

Nor does our Saviour content himself with telling us what we ought to do; he moreover proposes to us the model we should imitate.

imitate. *Be merciful as your Father is merciful.* Is not this plainly to insinuate, that God will not be our Father unless we shew mercy to our brethren? since we cannot be his children without bearing some resemblance to him.

Wherefore, as mercy, or the love of our neighbour, is so essential to the christian character, I will here, in the first place, unfold the pressing motives that engage us to love our neighbour; and in the second, the rules we ought to follow to love him properly, imploring the aid of the supreme wisdom for this purpose.

The principal motives, dear people, that should induce us to love our neighbour, are the following. We have all one and the same Father; one and the same Mother, and are all members of one common head. He is a child of the same Father, as ourselves, viz. of Jesus Christ. He is a child of the same Mother, viz. of the Church: He is a member of the same head and body, viz. of Jesus Christ and the Church united.

When the Deity created man, he did not design, St. Augustine says, that he should live alone, and secluded from society. He not only formed a companion for him in his solitude, but presently after, the human race was multiplied. And what were the views of God therein, continues this holy Doctor; but that men, being similar by nature, should have the like affections and desires? But alas! sin, in a short time, made a division between God and man; and this first division was the source, from which a variety of others, almost as fatal, took their rise.

It is our duty to consider all Christians as our equals and as our brethren; knowing that we all spring from one common stock. Such was the intention of the Son of God in calling us to his faith, to establish in our hearts the reign of charity and mutual love. He has made us all equal; by directing us all to say alike, *Our Father, who art in Heaven.* This equality then, which our Redeemer was desirous to introduce among us, is founded on the union we ought to have among ourselves, as children of the same parent. We are all equal therefore, and duty calls upon us to love one another as brethren.

Yes, Christians, we are all brethren, children of the same Father, formed on the cross in the adorable blood of Jesus Christ; and this fraternity is infinitely more binding than the ties of flesh and blood. Is it possible we can refuse to regard our neighbour with an affectionate benevolence, when we think of this?

Recollect, my friends, those awful moments, when our Redeemer, about to deliver himself up for our sins, inculcated the commandment of loving one another as the most important, the most affecting clause of his last will. *My children,* he says to the Apostles, and in them, to all his followers, *love one another: by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* John xiii. 35. *Holy Father!* he exclaims, *keep them in thy name, whom thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are;* John xvii.

xvii. 11. for by this shall *the world believe that thou hast sent me.* Ib. 21] The plan of our divine Saviour, therefore, his intention in engaging the world to believe in him was that we might all be united, all conjoined, all one. *That they may be one, as we also are.*

If you loved Christ, says the Apostle, you would have the like sentiments as Christ: Now what are these, but the feelings of a most sincere affection for all his children? And what are yours, my friends? Acknowledge it to your confusion; the gnawings of envy and animosity, of jealousy and hatred towards these same children, your own brethren. But remember the doctrine of St. John; *if any man says, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar.* 1 John iv. 20. For had you that regard for God which you profess, would you not love whatsoever he loves? since whatsoever he sets a value on becomes in some measure a part of himself.

Let us therefore love one another cordially, and make that our study on earth, which we hope will be our eternal employment in heaven. There we shall love perfectly, and be all united as the living stones of the same fabric; that mystical temple of charity, in which the Lord shall be for ever honoured. There we shall know and see each other without disguise, without suspicion; because we shall then be animated with the same spirit. How then can you hate those with whom you hope to live for all eternity? Why do you not begin at present what you wish to continue for endless ages?

But this is not all, my brethren. If we are children of the same Father, we are no less the off-spring of the same Mother. Baptism is the womb of the Church, in which the faithful are conceived: This the sacrament, by means of which that fruitful mother bears them all to Jesus Christ. Now, as in the order of nature, a child in its mother's womb has the same motion, the same life, in some measure, as its parent; so all Christians that are in the womb of one common mother, the Church, should have the same sentiments, the same inclinations, the same principle of life, so to speak, as she has.

What a pleasing sight, in the early ages of Christianity, to view the harmony that reigned among the primitive faithful? *The multitude of the believers*, say the sacred oracles, *had but one heart and one soul*: Acts iv. 32. because they all regarded themselves as enclosed in the womb of the same mother, where they had lately been produced. And as there was but one interest, so neither was there more than one mind among them. Yes, said the Pagans, speaking of them; they are kind, they are benevolent, they are charitable; for their creed, their morality, their gospel enjoin them to love their neighbours and to do good to every one. And from seeing their concord, their beneficence, their affability, the heathens were readily induced to declare openly in favour of a religion that professed such amiable virtues. And in fact, how wonderful must it have been to behold so complete an union among persons, who, for the most part, had

had not the slightest acquaintance ; people of different nations, and different climates ; whom neither languages nor customs could disunite. And this mutual charity, which the divine grace had formed, subsisted so long, that even in the age, in which St. Ambrose lived, it was still the subject of universal admiration. But if to shew you that you are children of the same parents be not enough to engage you to love your neighbour ; know, my friends, that a still closer tie unites you to him ; since you are members of the same head, which is Christ, and of the same body, which is the Church.

You are sufficiently instructed not to be ignorant that we all together constitute one body, of which Jesus Christ is the head, and ourselves are the members. *He, says St. Paul, is the head of the body, which is the Church ; Col. i. 18. and in another place he adds, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office ; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another. Rom. xii. 4. Let there be no schism,* then he concludes, *no division in the body.* You all collectively form the body of Christ, of which each one individually is a member. According to the inference therefore, which the Apostle draws from these premises, you are obligated, Christians, to give your fellow-creatures every assistance they may reasonably demand of you ; to be glad with them that rejoice, to condole with them that are in tears, to relieve their wants, to redress their grievances, if in your power, although even the so doing may possibly chance to expose you to an inconvenience. But how many of you act quite a different part ; who, instead of consoling your neighbour in his afflictions, whether spiritual or temporal, and commiserating his misfortunes, are glad of them ; and no less sorry than envious at his prosperity ? What would you say, were you to see the members of an acquaintance at war with one another ? The hands tearing the face, the teeth knawing the arms, &c. Would not you deem the person, that was come to such a pass, a madman, and fit for bedlam only ? What can I think of you therefore, when I behold you pulling one another to pieces, and attempting every mischief within your reach ? May I not with justice style you frantic ; since you endeavour to destroy the members of the same body as yourselves, the head of which is Jesus Christ.

Let us then love our neighbour, Christians ; since, having one and the same Father, we are all brothers, and aspire to the same inheritance ; let us love him, since, having the same mother, we are all carried in the same bowels : but above all, let us love him, because we are members of the same body as himself. Let it be our study to procure him every good, and to screen him from every evil as far as possible.

With obligations therefore that should unite you so closely to your fellow creatures, I have too good an opinion of you, brethren, not to be convinced that you are determined to adopt the sentiments of an
unlimited

unlimited benevolence. But as you may be mistaken in your ideas of the manner, in which this duty is to be complied with, I will in the next place discover to you how it is to be accomplished. First, we must love our neighbour, as we should be glad to be loved by him; secondly, we must love him, as we love ourselves; and thirdly, we must love him, as Christ has loved us.

We must love our neighbour, I say, as we would be loved by him, and behave to him in the same manner, as we would be willing he should behave to us. An admirable and altogether divine rule; which appeared so equitable to a certain Heathen Prince, that he deemed it a convincing proof of the veracity of the religion, that dictated it. Observe this rule, Christians, and there will be no cause for complaint. Consult but your hearts and the motions, they suggest in regard to yourselves. In our dealings with our neighbour, let us often ask ourselves: should I like to be used in this manner? to be treated with scorn, to be spoke to with contempt, to be addressed in a harsh or imperious tone, to be traduced, to be made a subject of ridicule, to have my slightest failings exaggerated, my best intentions wilfully misconstrued, my conduct censured on the most trivial grounds? In short, am I not desirous that others should be indulgent in regard to me? Why then do I not observe this comportment towards them?

Comprehend this principle thoroughly, my friends; a principle, which nature had impressed, upon you, long before you were acquainted with religion; and learn from it that our benevolence must be universal, and that no one is to be excluded from our affection, be he what he may. As we desire to be loved by all, and the enmity of one single person is sufficient to unhinge us; so it is equally just that we should love the whole world in our turn. Because the hatred of any individual, (notwithstanding we might harbour the most charitable dispositions in regard to every one besides) would effectually destroy charity. The reason of which is obvious; the motive of charity being general, it includes all mankind; as the motive of faith extends equally to every article of our belief: and as to lose our faith, it suffices to doubt wilfully of any one tenet of religion; so likewise to banish charity, it is sufficient to exclude one single person from our heart. True charity embraces all without distinction; and has as many brothers as there are men on earth; it makes no reserve of any kind whatever; because it considers every one as enclosed in the heart of Jesus Christ. Enlarge your ideas then, ye narrow-minded Christians! You are born for the whole world, and yet you scarcely count a friend in the place, where you reside.

Secondly, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Matt. xxii. 39. On which passage, St. Thomas remarks that the word *as thyself* does not imply an equality, but a resemblance of love; so that the affection, we have for ourselves, should be the pattern of that, which is due to our fellow-creatures. Now, in what does this resemblance consist? First, that the love of our neighbour must be similar to that, we entertain for ourselves, *as to its end*; i. e. as we ought to love ourselves for

for God's sake, our charity for our brethren must have the same end, in order to be *lo'y*. Secondly, it must be similar *as to its rule*; i. e. as we should never follow the bent of our own will, but for the performance of what is right; so neither must we ever condescend, through a mistaken complaisance, to any evil, that our neighbour may solicit of us; because our affection, to be *just*, can have no other rule but his welfare. Thirdly, it must be similar *as to its motive*; i. e. our love for our neighbour must be *sincere*; it must be founded neither on interest nor pleasure; but solely on that real good, which we ought to wish and procure for him, with the like attention and alacrity as we would for ourselves.

Now, examine your dispositions in this respect, my brethren. Do you never do that to your neighbour, which according to the dictates of prudence, you would be unwilling he should do to you? and do you always act by him, as in reason and religion, you would wish him to act in your regard? But see first if you understand rightly how to love yourselves; then I will recommend your neighbour to you, and exhort you to love him in a like manner. It is a mistake, says St. Prosper, to pretend a good will for our neighbour, unless we be animated with a pious zeal for his salvation; for such is the affection we are bound to have for ourselves. The love we owe to ourselves then, I say *that holy*, that *just*, that *sincere* love, which St. Thomas here treats of, is the model of the kindness, we should entertain for our fellow-creatures. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Does not this single sentence suffice to do away every prejudice? and whilst it regulates our duty, does it not impeach our conduct?

Tell me, Christians, was there ever a time, in which this benevolence towards our neighbour was less sincere, than it is at present? Is not interest the only bond, in a general way, that now-a-days unites us? Nay, in regard even to our relations and nearest connections is not this the cement of our affection? But shall we give the name of charity to such venal dispositions as these? No; the charity, that God requires, disowns such groveling sentiments; it opens our heart in relation to our brethren; and as the love we bear to ourselves, diminishes our faults in our own eyes, aggravates our misfortunes, and always adheres to us; so does charity cover the multitude of our neighbour's defects, it is alive to his misery, and never forsakes him, no, not even in the grave.

Shall I here be obligated to remind you, Christians, of what our divine Saviour did and suffered to prove his love for us? What humiliations did he not stoop to? What labours did he not undergo? What torments did he not endure, to free us from the slavery of Satan, under which we had so long groaned? Are not such exalted testimonies of his charity sufficient to induce you to regard your fellow-creatures with the eye of benevolence, to render them every service in your power, and not to be disgusted at their failings? And was not the beloved disciple, who so well understood the discipline of charity, in the right to draw this inference, that if God hath so

loved us, we ought to love one another? 1 John iv. 11. Think of what the Son of God has vouchsafed to do for others as well as for yourselves, and you will find no difficulty in assisting them under their necessities; your only desire then will be to give them, by your good offices, unequivocal proofs of the most affectionate and tender charity.

For take notice; to love our neighbour as we ought, we must love him as Christ loved us. *This is my commandment, he says, that you love one another as I have loved you.* John xv. 12. This is my new commandment, MY commandment, by excellence as it were. What a model! what an extent! how did Christ love us? With plenitude, with superabundance to an excess. *In this we have known the love of God, because he hath laid down his life for us,* 1 John iii. 16; and under what circumstances? at the time we were his enemies; *when we were as yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Rom. v. 8. By this charity, *he hath delivered us from the wrath to come.* 1 Thess. i. 10. By the same, *he hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.* Ephes. i. 3. This therefore, brethren, should be the model of your affection for your companions; *wherefore receive one another,* St. Paul concludes, *as Christ hath received you, to the honour of God.* Rom. xv. 7. But do you love your neighbour in this manner? How shall you be willing to give your life for him, when you refuse him what he wants for mere subsistence? What zeal have you testified for his salvation? to open his eyes to the light of truth? to point out to him the tract of happiness? By what motive principally have you been actuated in your conduct towards him? by the desire of extending the glory of God, or by the wish of promoting your own interests?

How great should be our confusion, adorable Saviour! at the sight of the small resemblance we bear to thee? Do we not every day behold the accomplishment of thy prophecy? *men shall betray one another and shall hate one another;* Matt. xxiv. 10. *and because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold.* ib. 12. Is not this prediction verified among ourselves, my friends? What do we every where see and hear, but some aspersing their neighbour by the most apparent obloquy; others lessening him by ways no less effectual, though not so barefaced; these busied in watching and undermining him; those intent on transmitting their unjust aversions to posterity; all, or the greatest part at variance, striving to supplant one another, and betraying an utter insensibility to their neighbour's calamities? Oh! dear brethren, cast your eyes on Jesus Christ our sacred model. Consider his charity for his Apostles, for his people, for all mankind, for you and for me. Imitate, by his grace, the noble pattern he has set before you; and form yourselves on this divine original.

Come, holy spirit! fill the hearts of my hearers, and kindle in them the ardent flames of thy love. O God of charity! give us a heart, that may embrace each individual with the most unreserved

ed affection ; give us a charity that may make but one mind of them, that have but one faith ; and a zealous benevolence, that may extend our good will to those of every different persuasion : that, having loved our fellow-servants as we desire to be loved by them, as we love ourselves, and as our divine Master has loved us all, we may hereafter be united in one common bond of charity in heaven. Amen.

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T H E

SECOND SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Happiness of a Good Communion.

A certain Man made a great supper and invited many.
Luke xiv. 16.

THIS parable, which our divine Saviour addresses to the Pharisees, admits of various interpretations. There are those, that refer it to the grand mystery of the incarnation of the Word, whom God was pleased to constitute the Redeemer of mankind: and there are others, who, by this great supper, understand that ineffable glory, that eternal beatitude, which Jesus Christ came to merit for us by the effusion of his blood. But how wide soever the range of interpretation may be, I have judged proper for your instruction, Christians, to confine myself to the opinion the most generally adopted by the Fathers; the greatest part of whom explain this parable of the Holy Eucharist; and such, in fact, seems to be the intention of the Church; as she presents us with it at the very time, in which she is fully occupied in recalling to our remembrance the unutterable mystery of this august sacrament.

Viewing it therefore in this light, the first thing, that attracts our admiration, is the excellence of the banquet, to which we are invited; an excellence, that cannot fail to strike us, whether we consider it with relation to the inviter, or to the happiness held out. For who is it that here gives the invitation? No other than the Sovereign Being: a God incarnate: the Son of God; frequently in the scriptures

tures termed the Son of Man, on account of his excessive love to the human race. And what is it he invites us to ? to every thing a God can give ; even to the possession of himself, and that for endless ages. Admirable as this may appear, the second thing which reflection suggests, is no less wonderful : I mean the backwardness of them that were invited to this solemn feast, and the truly pitiful excuses they resort to, to justify themselves in refusing the invitation. *I have bought a farm*, says the first, *I pray thee hold me excused*. This pretence St. Augustine calls the apology of pride ; where, whilst humility appears in the words, the manner betrays the disdainful sentiments of the heart. A second says ; *I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go and try them*. Here, brethren, is the plea of avarice. Alas ! how many do we find in our own days of this same unhappy turn, who prefer the advantages of their temporal welfare, to the duties of religion ? But, culpable as these are, there remains a third class, still more criminal ; a class, prefigured in the person, who for his excuse alleges, *he had married a wife, and therefore could not come* : those I mean, who abandon themselves to sensuality and lawless pleasure.

For our part, dear people, far from imitating the unthankfulness of those depicted in this parable, let us endeavour to avail ourselves of the great advantages Jesus Christ presents us with, in his divine banquet. From its excellence let us learn the happiness of a good communion ; and from the conduct of these unfortunate people, the dispositions requisite to communicate worthily. These are the two points, that I design, shall make the subject of the present discourse ; but let me first entreat you, brethren, to unite your prayers with mine, to draw down the blessing of God on our endeavours.

To make you sensible, my friends, of the happiness of a good communion, two considerations, each of them obvious and simple, may suffice. First, he who receives worthily, possesses Jesus Christ in his heart. Secondly, Jesus Christ comes to him, to enrich him with his choicest favours.

First, I say, the worthy communicant possesses Christ in his heart. Hear, brethren, what this adorable Saviour himself says ; *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him*. John vi. 57. To conceive the magnitude of the gift therefore, learn to comprehend the greatness of the donor, and to know who Christ is. This St. Paul informs us of, in his epistle to the Hebrews ; where, speaking of the person of the Son of God, he tells us that he participates fully of the *glory and substance of his Father* : that he *upholds all things by the power of his word* : that he *cleanses us from our sins* : that he *sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high*. Heb. i. 3. Behold then, Christians, with whose presence you are honoured, when so happy as to partake worthily of his holy table. You no longer speak and act for yourselves : it is Jesus Christ who speaks and acts for you. What a motive of confidence ! What a subject

of humble thanksgiving is the inestimable gift, he confers upon us in communion!

But let us not stop here, my friends. To say that we possess our heavenly Saviour, although at the instant only of receiving him, is to say a great deal. However, the excess of his tenderness carries him far beyond this. He tells us that he will *abide in us*, and that we shall *abide in him*; to give us to understand what we are to expect from him. Divine Saviour! accomplish thy promise; descend from thy altar, and take possession of those hearts, which expect, which call thee, and which thy grace has previously disposed, and prepared for thy reception. Yes, says this God, jealous of his conquest, *we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.* John xvi. 23. Whatever may have been hitherto the condition of this soul, at least its present state is such as I desire; it is mine, *it abideth in me, and I in it.* The world had robbed me of it; but since I have recovered, I will preserve it for the future. Take courage then, repenting sinner; *confide in me, I have overcome the world.* John xvi. 33. You have dishonoured me, it is true; but henceforward you shall add to my glory and to my triumph.

For observe, dear Christians, that the view of our divine Saviour, in giving himself to us in the Eucharist, is not barely to visit us; but to unite us to himself, and this by the most intimate connection possible. The truth of which, the very term we use to express the action by which we partake of the body and blood of Christ, clearly indicates. For the appellation, by which it is generally distinguished, is that of *communion*, that is to say, a common and mutual union between the person of the Son of God, and the soul, which is so happy as to receive him. He gives himself entirely to us; and we, on our part, should give ourselves wholly to him. In this adorable Sacrament, he communicates to us his spirit, his life, his dispositions: we ought therefore to receive his spirit in it: nor should we any longer act, but by his influence; nor live, but according to his life. As the nourishment, here presented to us, is wholly divine, so should we become altogether divine likewise.

Be not deluded, said formerly the beloved disciple; he, who is ambitious to satisfy his conscience with the pleasing assurance of abiding in Christ, must keep the road traced out to him by his Redeemer. *He, that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.* 1 John ii. 6. Have you, my friends, been made partakers of the bread of life? then Christ has transformed you into himself; live therefore like Christ; *walk even as he walked*: The model is perfect; do your best to copy it. When the food of salvation was offered to you, you promised to live no longer by your own life; that is, by the life of the world, of the senses, of the children of Adam. Accomplish what you are so solemnly engaged to, and render your vows to the most High. Live by Christ, as Christ lived by his Father. *As I, he says, live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me.* John

John vi. 58. As if he had said, observe it diligently, Christians; know your dignity, and be sensible of my love for you: take notice that I expect of you, who are now my members, what the Father expected of me. I have been, in every regard, his living image; and in like manner I require of you to be, in all respects, the living images and faithful representatives of me.

Such should be the sentiments of a Christian, who is blest with the possession of his God; in whom Christ lives, and who lives in Christ. What may he not promise himself from his divine presence? Fed with the Sacred flesh of his Saviour, he bears in his own person the glorious pledge of his future immortality. For according to the general doctrine of the holy Fathers, the Eucharist is the gage, as we may say, of that happy eternity, which is promised to us; and it is in this sense, dear brethren, that we are to understand those words of Christ, *He, that eateth this bread shall live for ever*. Your fathers, he says, were nourished with manna, and yet they are dead: but this will not be the case with the food that I shall give you, which is my own flesh; he, that shall partake of this, shall live eternally. Whence it is but just to conclude that a good communion is one of the surest means to obtain everlasting happiness.

But let us look still further, Christians, and behold the treasures, that our Jesus opens to us in the blessed Eucharist. To convince you of which, I shall be content to remark, in a few words, the disparity between the other sacraments and this adorable mystery of our altars. All the former have a particular effect; each of them producing that, which is peculiar to itself; whereas, the latter is an inexhaustible fund of almost unlimited graces. Thus the special effect of baptism is to do away that original stain, with which we are born: of confirmation, to strengthen us in our faith: of penance, to efface our actual sins. But the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, like the manna, which flattered each palate, and agreed with every constitution, without being appropriated to any virtue in particular, is a rich mine, where we may dig without ceasing, and which will amply supply every want, that we may have. In this celestial food, the primitive faithful found a firm support, under the most bitter persecutions: to this sanctuary they fled, and thence came forth, as St. Chrysostom tells us, animated with an ardour from above, which imboldened them to face death in all its horrors; for like lions breathing out flames, he says, their noble hearts dilated and acquired vigour, in proportion to the increase of the dangers, they were threatened with. This heavenly nourishment was the safe-guard of so many tender virgins, under the severest trials; who, fortified with this bread of angels, were every where seen to resist the most pressing solicitations; and contemning the allurements of flattery and pleasure, to superadd the glory of martyrdom to the unspotted honour of virginity. This same divine food was the comfort of innumerable hermits, in the lonesome solitude of their deserts, and their consolation, under the painful rigour of
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their austerities. Blessed effect of being admitted to a participation of the flesh of our Redeemer in the holy Eucharist !

Perhaps, dear people, you yourselves may have experienced that it is from this divine sacrament alone we can draw the strength necessary to encounter our vicious habits ; that strength, which we do not find in the resources of our nature but solely in the grace of Jesus. *I can do all things*, said St. Paul, *in him, who strengthens me* ; although of ourselves we can do nothing. Whence the surprising efficacy of his power appears evidently, in effecting such wonders by instruments so weak, as we are. Hence, dear Christians, be informed of what importance it is to communicate worthily ; and learn, whenever you approach to this heavenly feast, to prepare yourselves with the utmost diligence ; and especially, (as we must, notwithstanding all our efforts, be inferior to the task,) to offer your hearts to Jesus Christ ; entreating him to purify them, and to make them a fit habitation for himself ; whilst, on your part, you endeavour to bring with you every disposition, that may possibly contribute to perfect this sacred action.

But what are these dispositions, you will ask ? They are reducible, I reply, to the three following heads, purity, humility, and divine love.

And when I say that purity is one of the three things, that are essentially requisite to the due performance of this grand work ; I speak not only of a conscience clean from mortal, but even from venial sin, as far as is possible, considering the frailty of human nature. For as the former would infallibly render our communion noxious ; so an affection to the latter would certainly deprive us of the fruits, which it should otherwise produce. In the primitive Church, the Deacon, on the point of distributing this sacred food, called aloud, *holy things for the holy* ; as if he had said, resumes St. Chrysostom ; let no one approach, who is not holy ; let none partake of this eucharistic banquet, but such as, besides being exempt from sin, are moreover distinguished by their particular sanctity. For how spotless a purity, says this great Doctor, ought not he to bring with him, who has the honour to be admitted to this divine sacrament ? Ought not the hand, which divides this sacred flesh ; the lips, that are purpled with this adorable blood, to surpass the very solar rays in candour ?

In effect, my brethren ; if, as the Fathers teach unanimously, our flesh is united by communion to the flesh of Christ ; if our breasts become the temples, in which this divine Saviour deigns to reside, how great should be our purity, not only from those more atrocious vices, which the Apostle forbids us to name even, but also from the least defilement whatsoever. A purity, that not only excludes all indecent actions, but likewise every word or thought of a criminal tendency. A purity, my friends, that exacts of you to renounce, now and for ever, all swearing, impatience, envy, quarrels, hatred, lying and detraction : to renounce, I say, these
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and all similar disorders, which are incompatible with the spirit of Christ and the Gospel. This is to prepare yourselves duly, and to put on that purity, which is the first thing required to a worthy communion.

A second, and a no less necessary disposition, is a true humility, which the least degree of faith cannot fail to inspire us with. To sink us into our own nothing it might suffice to be assured that, in communicating, we are personally incorporated with the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth. And surely, if St. John, that illustrious percursor of Jesus Christ, canonized by the mouth of truth itself, deems himself unworthy even to loose the latches of his heavenly master's shoes, what would he have thought, to what pitch of humiliation would he not have stooped, had the Son of God been desirous to unite himself with him, as he does with us? Let us ever have before our eyes, my brethren, as St. Chrysostom inculcates, the honour, we here receive; the table, we are invited to. This alone will be sufficient to fill us with the sentiments of a most respectful and profound humility.

With these dispositions the Saints were studious to provide themselves, whenever they partook of these august mysteries. Many of them were so penetrated with the sense of their unworthiness, that, at the sight of the holy viaticum, recalling their exhausted spirits, they went to meet their Saviour on his drawing near: when, prostrate on the ground, in bodies, which already attested the horrors of the grave, they adored this physician of their souls in such lively sentiments of debasement, as if desirous to annihilate themselves.

Let it be your study, Christians, to approach to this awful table with similar dispositions. Touched with regret, at the recollection of the defects, that have accompanied your past communions, say to your God with the Centurion; *Lord! I am not worthy thou shouldst enter under my roof.* Say it, I repeat; but not, as it is too usual, through form and custom; but with a profound respect and a sincere conviction of your unworthiness. No, *Lord! I am not worthy* to be favoured with thy sacred company. The frailty of my corruption, my innumerable and daily increasing failings, the grievousness of my sins, my want of love; this combination of humbling causes renders me infinitely undeserving of a blessing, which could never be sufficiently estimated, if it was properly understood. No, certainly *I am not worthy*; for although my love for thee should be equal to that of the Seraphims; although I had done as much to promote thy glory, as the Saints; although I should bring with me the sanctity of those celestial spirits, that surround thy throne; still I should be unworthy not only to receive thee into my soul, but to appear even in thy presence. *Lord! I am not worthy.* But my God! my Creator! my Saviour! since thou hast vouchsafed to give thyself for my spiritual food, I will dare to present myself before thee. Washed in the saving waters of repentance,

repentance, in the spirit of an unfeigned humility, I will run to thy table, there to *take the chalice of salvation*; and filled with gratitude for thy favours, and with confidence in thy mercies, I will proclaim for ever the wonders of thy name.

The third virtue, friends, which I say is necessary to communicate worthily, is divine love; by which I here mean an ardent desire, a sacred impatience to participate in this eucharistic banquet. For if it be allowed that one of the best dispositions to profit by our corporal food is to eat it with an appetite; let us confess that to long with a holy eagerness for the table of the Lord is one of the most suitable preparations, we can possibly bring to it. In this august sacrament, the flesh of Christ is to our souls what our daily sustenance is to our bodies. Such is the opinion of all the Fathers; who seem to require that we should feel, in our hearts, at the approach to this bread of life, those eager longings, which the Patriarchs experienced, at the recollection of their promised Messiah, and cry out with still more reason, *Come, O Lord! come, and do not tarry.*

At the sight of that indifference for this sacred banquet, which is but too conspicuous among us, with sorrow I acknowledge I cannot easily conceive how, notwithstanding the tender invitations of our God, who says to us, *Take and eat, do ye this in remembrance of me*: 1 Cor. i. 24. there are found so many, that reject the gifts, he offers with such an unbounded liberality. Oh deplorable blindness! It is not usual for us to refuse the acceptance of temporal presents: on the contrary, we are glad, we are eager to receive them. I frequently observe, my brethren, the hardships you submit to, the pains you take, the fatigues you undergo. A very moderate gain is often the scanty recompense of the assiduous labour of one or even many days. All your endeavours are for the goods of this life. Others, of a far superior quality, are held out to you, and you refuse them; scarcely do you think of them, and sometimes you even formally despise them. Christians! did you but *know the gift of God*; did you comprehend its worth; were you sensible who that Jesus is, that here vouchsafes to give himself to you for your sustenance, your indifference would want no other remedy. There is nothing, take notice, superior to Jesus Christ. He offers himself to you, and what will he gain by your acceptance? Will it add an atom to his happiness? No, my friends, no, it is not this, it is yourselves, your wants, he has in view; to which unparalleled procedure he is prompted by nothing but by love. *My delight*, he says, *is to be with the children of men.* Prov. vii. 31. Shall not this suffice to rouse your feelings, when you consider what you lose by so criminal a negligence?

Having thus unfolded to you, Christians, with that zeal, with which the God, whom we revere upon our altars, has inspired me, the happiness of uniting yourselves to him by a holy communion, and the dispositions necessary to receive him worthily; what have

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I more to add, but to address to you those words of Moses, so apposite to the present subject, and which he addressed to the Jews, after having proposed to them good or evil, life or death, a blessing or a curse; *I call heaven and earth to witness that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.* Deut. xxx. 19. Yes, my dear people, I appeal to heaven, and the earth will bear me testimony, that, in inviting you to this sacred banquet, I have proposed to you *life*, and the fountain head of every *blessing*: and that, in supplying you, (by explaining the dispositions required to the just performance of this duty) with a sure preservative against sacrilegious communions, I have pointed out to you the means of avoiding *death*, and the source of the most tremendous maledictions. Profit, I entreat you, by the information, and do your utmost to receive your divine Saviour in these holy dispositions; that the communions, which you make in these days of your salvation, may dispose you for your last, whenever it shall arrive; which, by these means, will become to you the assurance of a glorious immortality. Amen.

T H E

THIRD SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On Human Respects.

The Scribes and Pharisees murmured; saying, this Man receiveth sinners. Luke xv. 2.

IN answer to whom, our Redeemer in another passage tells us ; *blessed is he who shall not be scandalized in me.* Matt. xi. 6. This is the touchstone of his true disciples ; this the criterion of their faith. *He, he says, that is not with me, is against me ;* Luke xi. 23, thereby excluding from his kingdom those timid Christians, who, instead of declaring for, are ashamed of him. This criminal bashfulness, this unhappy concern for the opinion of the world, is what I here mean to speak of. But in attacking this fruitful source of scandal, human respects, my friends, it is proper I should apprise you that, if there are occasions, in which it is requisite to despise the judgments of men, unless we would renounce the character of Christians, so there are likewise circumstances, in which it is our duty to pay them a just deference. For your instruction therefore on this head, I here design to teach you to make this just distinction ; by pointing out to you, in my first part, the occasions, in which we must contemn ; and in my second, those, in which we should respect the censures of mankind. But to succeed in the undertaking, let us jointly implore the divine blessing, in a short petition to the spirit of light.

That we must despise the opinions of mankind in general, brethren, is a truth authenticated by religion, and founded on the exalted nature

ture of our vocation. In quality of Christians, says the Apostle, we are called to the happy liberty of the children of God. Whereas, to become slaves to the judgments of men, would be to put shackles on our freedom, and to reduce ourselves to the most abject servitude. Every Christian, in consideration of his character, may say with St. Paul ; *with me it is a small thing to be judged by any man ; because he, that judgeth me, is the Lord.* 1 Cor. iv. 3. Whence it naturally follows that, whenever it is impossible to please both God and man, there is no room for hesitation ; and that we are bound to condemn the censures of the world on the subsequent occasions : First, when they militate against the precepts of the gospel : Secondly, when the honour of God demands it of us ; and thirdly, when we cannot pay attention to them without the hazard of salvation.

I say first, when they militate against the precepts of the gospel : and this no doubt, is what St. Peter meant, when he said ; *let no one suffer as a murderer or a thief ; but if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God in this name.* 1 Pet. iv. 15. Yes, my friends, it is commendable, to respect the opinions of men, whenever they restrain you from what is unlawful ; but when they clash with the injunctions of the gospel, when they would deter you from a close adhesion to the essential duties of religion, so far from being intimidated by the censures of the libertine ; you have just reason to rejoice at his contempt, and to *glorify God in the Christian name.*

And verily, my brethren, how unhappy should we be circumstanced if, to pay obedience to the divine precepts, it was requisite we should have the approbation of those, who make it their boast to acknowledge no law, and to spurn at every thing that thwarts their passions ? Long since has war been declared between Christ and the world ; and while men shall continue to be dissolute, unjust and lovers of themselves, so long will there be censurers of the gospel, and people interested to decry its morality. And this I repeat after Jesus Christ, our common master. When you go forth, he says to his disciples, to publish my doctrine, you will find as many obstacles among mankind, as they have passions that enslave them. They will despise, hate and persecute you. *But fear them not : fear only him, that can destroy both body and soul in hell.* Matt. x. 28.

Wherefore, dear people ; when you tell us, as is sometimes the case, that the apprehension of what the world will say prevents you from hearkening to the voice of Christ ; that you are cordially disposed to be good Christians, would but mankind do justice to religion, &c. do not pretend to seek shelter in such excuses. On the contrary, instead of extenuating, you aggravate your guilt. It is as if you said ; although I am satisfied that whatever the gospel teaches is indubitably certain ; nevertheless for fear of displeasing a depraved set of men, I act against my reason, and in contradiction to my conscience ;

ence ; I betray that virtue, which I approve of and prefer the world to my God. What can there be more dastardly in itself, or more injurious to the Deity ?

That to yield to the impetuosity of a blind passion, is a weakness, of which man is but too capable, I readily conceive. But for a Christian, a person regenerated in the waters of baptism and fed with the bread of life, to be intimidated by the phantom of human respects ; to continue to frequent bad company and those resorts of dissipation, where the least loss is that of his money, rather than incur the ridicule of the profligate ; this, my brethren, I confess appears incomprehensible to me. It is a crime, which is not to be palliated, a conduct, that reflects disgrace both on the Christian and his religion. *Dearly beloved !* said St. Peter formerly, *if you be reproached for the name of Christ, you shall be happy ; for the honour, the glory, the power of God and his spirit rest upon you.* 1 Pet. iv. 14. And I, by an opposite, although equally conclusive way of reasoning tell you, my friends, that if you cannot resolve on suffering reproaches for the name of Christ, and on exposing yourselves to the censures of mankind, you have neither the spirit, nor the grace of our divine religion : the spirit of God resteth not on you.

And to sound this subject to the bottom ; who are they, that check you in the pursuit of virtue, and of whose judgments you are so apprehensive ? For the most part such, as you would be utterly unwilling to consult on any interesting point ; giddy, licentious, dissipated people. Such is the description of those, you fear, in the most serious of all concerns. Is this to act reasonably ? I appeal to yourselves : how often, in complaining of the injustice of mankind, have you said that they did not know you ; that they wronged you in thinking you capable of such base intentions ? How often have you declaimed against the blindness of men, who in general bestow encomiums on vice and brand virtue with the most unjust aspersions ? How often has your conscience secretly told you, that you neither merited the praises, that were given to you, nor the odium, with which you were stigmatized ? What can prove more evidently, Christians, that the judgments of the world are frivolous and rash ? and of consequence, that it is the extreme of folly to be enslaved to its caprices ?

But it is not sufficient, brethren, to despise the judgments of the world, when they militate against the gospel ; we must moreover condemn them, whenever the honour of God requires it ; and this our divine master teaches in the whole course of his deportment. Doubtless he, to whom the secrets of every heart are visible, could not be ignorant of the many unfavourable opinions, which the Scribes and Pharisees had formed of him, as we see in the lesson of this day. Nevertheless, this God of sanctity does not think himself exempted from prosecuting the plan, for which he had become incarnate, on account of their malicious insinuations. The example of their master was a pattern for the Apostles. For not to mention the cruel persecutions,

secutions, to which their mission exposed them ; in what disadvantageous, nay, in what odious colours, were they not painted by the heathens ? What do they say of St. Paul at Thessalonica ? that he is a disturber of the public peace. What at Athens ? that he is a madman, and as such they insult him. Nor were the other Apostles, according to the testimony of the same St. Paul, more respected. They were every where treated as the most contemptible of beings : *We are made as the refuse of the world.* 1 Cor. iv. 13. Notwithstanding which, did they cease to announce the truths, that had rendered them so obnoxious ? No ; because they were convinced of this evangelical maxim, that it is better to obey God, than men ; and that, after all, the most effectual method to stop their mouths is to persevere steadily in the cause of virtue.

For to come to the matter of fact ; my friends ; what can men say, that should disquiet you so much and give you such uneasiness ? Will they say that you are fickle ; because you espouse the part of God, after having so long had at heart that of your passions ? Happy inconstancy ! that enlists you on the side of virtue, and devotes you to the service of your Maker. Will they call you weak and silly ? holy folly ! a thousand times more enlightened than all the wisdom of the earth ; since it induces you to prefer solid and eternal goods to things transitory and perishable. To intimidate you, will they say that you are imprudent, and will not be able to go on with what you have undertaken ? Salutary reproaches ! which should animate your fervour. That since your conversion you are become good for nothing ? fortunate contempt ! that engages you to give yourselves wholly to the Lord ; since, in the opinion of the world itself, you are henceforth useless to it. Such, dear Christians, are the terrors, that affright you ; such the obstacles, that stop you in the moment of your conversion, and keep you in a languid suspense between virtue and vice. But would it not be far more honourable to declare in favour of your duty, than to be enslaved to the vain, capricious, interested opinions of mankind ? You must disregard their judgments therefore, when the honour of God requires it ; and lastly, I add, whenever the great concern of salvation is at stake.

On whichever side we turn ourselves, nothing is to be seen but irresolute Christians ; who, although convinced of the emptiness of the world, are yet desirous to keep in with it. But I must inform you, brethren, of a point, which you have perhaps never considered seriously ; viz. that nothing is more fraught with danger to your salvation, than this timid prudence, especially at the beginning of your repentance, which is a time for exertion, and not for caution.

And truly, dear people, I can scarcely conceive that a soul, impressed with a horror of its crimes, touched with a desire of returning to God, instructed in the solemn truths of religion, in the knowledge of a hell, a heaven, an eternity, can be concerned about the judgments of the world. Beware, my friends ; the consequences of such a weakness are truly alarming. For is there not every reason

to apprehend, that by thus desiring to retain the favour of men, you will resume your cast-off fetters, will abandon your Creator, and declare insolently for the creature? Fear the world; this I not only approve of, but recommend to you. Fear it however as your enemy, and not as your judge. Such a fear will put you on your guard, and make you shun it. Break off too intimate a connection with it, and thus you will avoid those censures, that appear so formidable at present.

Unhappy slaves to human respects! Will you still stand in awe of the opinions of the world, of which you cannot but acknowledge the corruption. Shall nothing be able to inspire you with that spirit of independence, which is the genuine character of Christianity? That steady firmness, that noble intrepidity in the cause of virtue, which raises a man above the judgments of the earth; which attaches him to his duty by indissoluble bonds; which forbids him to allow any rule to act by but the gospel; any judge but his conscience; any reward but that which God is preparing for him? Solid however as these principles may be, the perverseness of the human mind may still abuse them; for what will it not abuse? Thus, my brethren, if it is beneath a Christian to model his conduct by the opinions of mankind; if, generally speaking, their judgments are to be contemned, as you have seen; so likewise there are circumstances, in which religion itself commands us to have a deference for them.

The two great principles by which all our actions should be squared, are the love of ourselves, and the love of our neighbour: a Christian love, understand me, that has no other view but God and salvation. Hence it follows, that we must respect the judgments of the world, first, when our own eternal welfare demands it; and secondly, when that of our neighbour requires it of us.

We must respect them, I say, first, when our own eternal welfare demands it; and this is an incontestable maxim; for the understanding, which, let us distinguish three kinds of judgments, that are found in common life; first, an equitable judgment, by which the world itself, directed solely by the law of nature, arraigns whatever is contrary to christian morality. Secondly, a censorious judgment, by which it is led to overlook nothing in such as make profession of virtue and piety. And thirdly, a malignant judgment, by which it often misconstrues the most innocent actions. Now, the interest of our salvation, I say, requires us to respect each of these three judgments.

Yes, dear people, if you are true Christians, attached to the honour of your religion, you should reason thus. The world condemns such grosser sins as violate its received notions of decorum; it is inexorable in regard to the professors of devotion, whose slightest errors in its eyes appear crimes; nay, it often carries its malignity so far, as to censure them on the most trifling grounds: therefore, I must refrain from those lawless doings, which the world itself condemns: therefore, I must keep a constant guard upon myself, judge myself rigorously,

rouly, and not pardon even the smallest faults: therefore, I must not only avoid evil, but its very appearance. And why? because, as a Christian, I am bound to be attached to my religion, and to support its honour, which is inseparably connected with my own.

Such was the reasoning of St. Peter, to confirm the faithful of his days in the practice of virtue. Dearly beloved! he said, the Gentiles have their eyes upon you; conduct yourselves therefore in such a manner, that instead of *speaking against you*, as they are entirely disposed, *considering you by your good works, they may give glory to God.* 1 Peter ii. 12.

Moreover, how extremely perilous would our situation be, if, satisfied with ourselves, we should adopt an entire contempt for the opinions of the world? How many, alas! have fallen into the grossest crimes through this mistaken notion? Had they only given such opinions their proper weight; had they continued to feel the impression of that awe, which once made them fearful of doing even the most innocent things, if not clear of suspicion, they might perhaps have been models of virtue to this day. But, because they trusted to the integrity of their intentions, and affected to hold cheap the judgments of mankind; what was insignificant at first, has become their bane, and disregarded levities have gradually hardened them to the commission of the most barefaced iniquity. There are circumstances then, you see, my friends, in which the interest of our own salvation demands that we should shew a submission to the opinions of the world. Let us next examine briefly on what occasions we must respect them for the welfare of our neighbour.

To comprehend what I am going to say, you must remark two sorts of judgments in this regard; first, a judgment of prevention, i. e. a judgment, by which our neighbour conceives a bad opinion of us on surmises and false reports. Secondly, a judgment of ignorance and weakness, by which well-meaning, but simple people, are scandalized without cause, and imagine they see guilt where no such thing exists. Now charity, I say, requires us to respect both these kinds of judgments. And for what reason? because we cannot slight them, without hazarding the salvation of our brethren.

It may seem, I confess, my dear people, a very great exertion, to bear the unjust opinions men may form of us without complaint. But charity goes still further. Not content with preserving peace, it is desirous to efface the very faintest impressions of any injurious suspicion, the world may have harboured of us. It is true, to speak in general terms, that a Christian should despise the censures and rash judgments of mankind: but he is not to make light of their salvation. What do I say? it is his duty to endeavour to eradicate their prepossessions; either by explaining his conduct, and acquainting them with his intentions; or by evincing the injustice of their prejudices, by an exemplary life. I assert yet more; there are oc-

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casions, in which their very ignorance and weakness claims our deference.

Yes, my brethren, there are things indifferent, and no ways unlawful in themselves, from which we are bound to abstain, rather than become a cause of scandal to our neighbour. Of this matter St. Paul was solicitous to convince the Romans, in the fourteenth chapter of his epistle to them; where he treats of those, who having embraced Christianity, were still desirous to observe the Jewish rites in some particulars. *I know*, he says, that no food is unclean of itself: that Christ has done away the curse, which sin had entailed on the productions of the earth: whence he concludes, that all sorts of meats may be eat indiscriminately. Nevertheless, he adds, *if meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat it.* 1 Cor. viii. 3. Will you endanger the salvation of him, *for whom Christ died*, for such a trifle? *Will you destroy the work of God for meat?* Rom. xiv. 20. Apply this lesson of the Apostle to yourselves, my friends; and, although the consequence should be that you must part with what is otherwise the most allowable; be ready so to do, when the eternal welfare of your neighbour calls for such a sacrifice.

From this day, for ever, dear people, let us be undeceived in regard to the mistaken notions we had formed on the subject now before us. Not to err on either side, let us observe a due medium, and listen to religion. If, on the one hand, she condemns the servile fear of those who stand in so great awe of the judgments of mankind; on the other, she reprobates the false independence of them that think themselves so far above the reach of others, as to affect to disregard their censures. Let us learn (and may such be the fruit of this discourse) to despise the judgments of the world, whenever they deter us from complying with the dictates of our duty. Let us respect them when they have a tendency to promote the interests of virtue. By thus steering clear of both extremes, we may hope to reach safely the port of eternal bliss. Amen.

T H E

FOURTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Good Employment of Time.

Master, we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing.
Luke v. 5.

WHATEVER is written in the Gospel, Christians, is designed for our instruction, to the end, that by the consolation we receive from reading or meditating on those sacred oracles, we may be confirmed in the expectations of futurity. The lessons, which the portion of it allotted for this Sunday exhibits, are many; but not here to enter into a detail of its circumstances, I have selected the fifth verse of it, which sets before us a subject of the most interesting nature; the right use, I mean, and employment of time.

Master, says St. Peter, we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing; but at thy word I will let down the net: which when he had done, adds the Evangelist, they caught such a prodigious quantity of fish, that the *net broke*. Here, brethren, is the information, to which I entreat you to attend.

St. Peter, obedient to the word of Christ, retrieves, by a single cast of his net, the many hours, which during the night had been wasted in useless labour. In a like manner, we, by one sole action performed in the name, and by the virtue of Jesus Christ, may still make good all the time, that we have hitherto thrown away on fruitless and ungrateful toil. We have laboured for the world, we have la-

loured for creatures, *we have laboured all the night*; and still our hands are empty. But let us obey the voice of the Son of God; let us work under his direction; and a short space will suffice to recover the many years we have lost in indolence, and perhaps in sin. We have resembled the labourers in the vineyard, who stood idle all the day. Nevertheless, if we now take up, and employ in a proper manner this *last hour*, that is to say, the time which is still at our disposal, we shall receive an equal reward with those, who *have born the burthen of the day and the beats*.

To this happy resolution I will here make it my business to excite you, friends; first, by representing the motives that should engage every Christian to a right use of his time; and secondly, by explaining to you in what the proper use of it consists. That my endeavours may not be fruitless, nor your attention solicited in vain, let us, in the first place, implore the grace of God; which he will never refuse to them, that apply to him with the disposition of sincerity and the servour of a good will.

To ~~now~~ the subject now before me, Christians, into as small a compass as its nature will admit of, there are three considerations I affirm respecting time, that establishes its immense value. It is precious; it is useful; it is irreparable.

The worth of a thing we usually estimate either by its price, by its rarity, or by its being in a particular manner our own. Whichever of these sides we choose to view it on, we shall find time to be the *brightest jewel of our inheritance*.

The Sovereign Being is the author of time, no less than of every other part of the creation. He gave it to man originally, that he might employ it in his service; instead of which, abusing it by his crimes, the offending Adam forfeited it in an instant, and deserved to have no further portion of it allowed either to him or to his offspring, for the expiation of his disobedience. And this must have been the case, had not our Redeemer, by restoring man his abused rights, regained for him that time which sin had stript him off. But what did it cost him? Nothing less than his own most sacred blood. Oh ye heavens! what an inestimable price! the time that I now enjoy, is the purchase of the blood of my God! how pressing a motive not to lose a moment of it!

But what still enhances the value of our time, dear people, is that of all things, it is the most rare, and the least at our command. No portion of it but the present, can be justly termed our own: now this present includes but a moment; so that in fact, one sole moment of it is at our disposal. The days, says St. Augustine, which we style ours, slide off almost before they come; and when they arrive, they disappear so rapidly, that we can scarce believe they have existed. The time past is fled beyond our call; the future is but in expectation; and no sooner does it shew itself, than again it vanishes. *Son, says the wise man, observe the time.* Eccles iv.

iv. 23. Be sure to keep a watchful eye upon it, or it will certainly elude thy vigilance.

Nevertheless, rare as time is, one advantage still accompanies it, viz. that the lot of it, which we possess, is in a peculiar manner our own. Yes, my friends, it is ours; and even, as St. Bernard says, it is the only thing that we can truly term so. Honours, riches, &c. are not ours; they are adventitious, they are foreign to us. But time, Christians, is essentially our own: it is a property, which nothing, death itself not excepted, can deprive us of. However, we may be prevented, you will say, from praying, from assisting at the divine service, from attending instructions and the like, which alone can render our time beneficial to us. I allow it; but I will also tell you what perhaps you are not acquainted with; that you may make these hinderances subservient to your welfare, and so many means of salvation; so that, to speak accurately, it is in the power of no one to rob you of your time. Precious then must it be most certainly; since the price of it is so great; since it is so rare; since it appertains to us so peculiarly. Let us proceed to its utility.

Raise up your eyes, dear brethren, to that seat of bliss, where the favoured soul, in the enjoyment of its God, exults in the possession of every happiness that heaven can bestow. Enquire of it the worth of time, and it will tell you, with St. Paul, a *momentary tribulation hath worked for us, above measure exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory*. 2 Cor. iv. 17. With what a heart-felt satisfaction does it look back upon the time it spent so profitably, a part of it in prayer, and a part of it in superintending the education of its children, and the charges of its family? It recalls the measures that it took, to avoid not only all dangerous meetings, in which time is abused to criminal purposes; but likewise those societies, of which inutility is the basis, and loss of time the smallest evil. How agreeable is this remembrance to it? how sweet the recollection of time employed so successfully in gaining eternal happiness?

On the other side, my friends, descend for a moment into those regions of woe, where *everlasting horror dwells*. See the grief that harrows up the sinner, for having spent the time his God had given him for the purpose of salvation, in the wild pursuits of passion; his sorrow at the thoughts of days wasted in gaming, in drinking, in debauchery; his piercing, but unavailable regret for the loss of the many hours which might have been so serviceable to his welfare; but which unfortunately he has perverted to his ruin; that precious season of Lent, these Sundays, those holidays, which he rather chose to spend in an ale-house, or idle company, than at his devotions, or attending to the word of God, which would have directed him into the road to heaven. Hence his dark reflections, his violent rage, his unutterable despair. Here, dear people, let us be taught to make a right use of our time, and to turn it to profit, *while we have it*; for the *night is coming on, in which no one can work*. John ix. 4. And when you waste this talent, know that you do yourselves the greatest

greatest of all injuries ; since, besides that it is most precious and useful, the loss of it is also irrecoverable ; which is the last reflection I shall suggest to evince the care with which you ought to husband it.

There is no evil in nature without its remedy. Thus, a decayed health may be recovered, a house consumed by fire may be rebuilt, a broken fortune may be retrieved, &c. but time, and time alone is irreparable. Once past, it never can be recalled ; it glides away imperceptibly, to appear no more ; the Deity himself cannot restore it. At present, Christians, it depends upon yourselves alone to employ it well ; but if unhappily you lose it, it must be lost for ever. You have it now in your power to avoid this or that criminal action ; but if you commit it, it will be eternally true to say, that you have done so. The repentance of David was most exemplary : the time he gave to pleasure, short ; that which he spent in sorrow, long, very long indeed ; nevertheless, while the world shall subsist, in perpetuating the memory of his distinguished conversion, mankind shall also be informed of his adultery and murder.

Who, says an ancient author, shall restore the years, we now squander away so unprofitably ? O God ! thou alone dost know the irremediable loss we suffer, by the omission of so many good works, as we have it daily in our power to perform ; each of which would produce eternal, neverfailing fruit.

Make then, I repeat, a right use of time while you have it, brethren. The present is the only season. For allowing you to have in reversion as much of it as you have already wasted, it may not be so applicable to the great work of salvation. The more we advance in years, the less capable we become of labour. How then can we expect to retrieve the years that we have lost in the decrepit feebleness of age ?

Be persuaded to begin from this very hour to redeem the time that you have so unfortunately thrown away. Wait not for that awful day, in which it will rise up against you, and unveil, in the face of the universe, the manner in which you have squandered it. Then shall you be sensible of its value, when you shall hear the asseverations of the Angel, mentioned in the Apocalypse, swearing that *time shall be no longer*. In vain shall you then attempt to profit by it : it is but just that he, who refuses to make use of a thing when in his power, should be deprived of it when he is willing so to do. You have idled away, you have mispent, you have abused your time, will the Angel say ; and *by him, that liveth for ever and ever, time shall be no longer*. Apoc. x. 6. Such, dear people, are the motives that should induce you to a good employment of your time ; it only now remains to see in what this employment of it may consist.

And here, my friends, in the first place let me entreat you to make a reflection with me, which perchance you may have often made, but never with due consideration. How great must our folly

folly be, so frequently, and with such facility, to abuse that time which is to decide our eternal doom! You think you employ it properly, because your days are taken up with almost incessant occupations. The usurer may say the same, whose every moment is devoted to the service of iniquity. No, brethren, no. The hurry of life, and the right use of time, are by no means similar. But what more then, will you say, is required of us? I will tell you briefly; to sanctify, as much as possible, all your actions; to refer every day and every hour of each day to your Creator; and if you are humble, sober, diligent, &c. to strive to be so, not from the influence of temporary considerations, as many heathens have; but from a principle of obedience to the law of God, who exacts these virtues of you: in a word, whatsoever you do, to do it not with a view to please men and court their esteem; but to honour the Deity, and promote his service.

But, my dear friends, what will assuredly appear in judgment against us in our laborious assiduity for the affairs of the world, and our well-known indolence in regard to future. The concern of salvation is the most important, not to say the sole business of our life. Notwithstanding which, it is likewise the affair we neglect the most, and to which by far the least portion of our time is allotted. Was I to take to pieces the œconomy of your days, I should find an allowance marked out for every thing but this. So many hours for meals, so many for diversions, &c. while eternity is scarce permitted to put in its claim to one poor quarter. A short morning prayer, hurried over precipitately, entitles you, you think, to spend the remainder of the day as fancy may direct; and for excuse, you allege that you are occupied with concerns which will not admit of any further leisure. But let me tell you, brethren; the man who can find time to make himself acquainted with the secrets of his business, to become a good merchant, a good farmer, a good mechanic, or the like, will never be dispensed with at the bar of the divine justice for not having found sufficient leisure to make himself a good Christian. “No, says a very heathen; we have no reason to complain of the want of time; our life is long enough for all purposes, if duly arranged.” It is not time then, it is ourselves that are in fault, and highly censurable for the mismanagement or improper application of it.

But, methinks I hear some one say; must I then be always praying, always at some serious work or other, without being allowed any leisure for recreation? Do not mistake me, Christians; I should be very unwilling to lay a greater burthen on you than you can bear. I know that relaxation is frequently necessary: but nevertheless, I am sensible, and so must you, if you will but be candid, that there is a wide difference between a casual amusement, which is often requisite to unbend the mind, and a perpetual round of dissipation that excludes every serious employment. We should act in to diversions, as we do in respect to our meals, which r

for according to her feelings; that is, we should take them when they are wanted, and, by a well-directed intention, make them subservient to more interesting concerns.

How then must we employ our time to spend it lawfully? We must employ it, I answer, in the discharge of our duties; of which, my friends, there are two principal and distinct branches; the duties of religion, and the duties of our respective callings: or, in other words, the duties of Christians, and those of men.

In the first place then, as Christians, you are obliged to begin and to end each day with prayer; to raise your hearts frequently in the intermediate time to God, referring all your actions to him; to sanctify the Sundays, and such Festivals as may be enjoined; to feed your souls with the bread of his sacred word; to inform yourselves and instruct your families in the way of salvation; to frequent the sacraments, &c. In short, as Christians, you are bound to attend much more to the welfare of your souls, than that of your bodies, according to the saying of your great master; *what will it avail a man to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul?* Matt. xvi. 26.

Alas! my brethren, to how many of you might I address those words of the Father of the family; *why stand you here all the day idle?* Matt. xx. 6. Will you answer me with those labourers, *because no one hath hired us*, ib. and we have nothing to do? What! have you no families to take care of; no children to instruct and initiate in the service of God; no servants to instruct in the principles of faith and morality; or to make acquainted with the practice of confession, communion, and other duties? *You have nothing to do?* Is there no one sick, to whom to extend a supporting hand? no one in affliction, whose tears you may dry up? no other good works to practise which are never wanting to them that look for them? *You have nothing to do?* Are not your sins to be expiated and your God appeased; hell to be avoided and heaven gained? Say rather that you have many things to do, of which you have thought but little. Was there ever a more gross delusion?

Besides the obligations of a Christian, it is incumbent on every one to acquit himself with fidelity of the functions of his particular state and calling. The variety of these states, with which the world is chequered, is ordained by the Almighty himself; and it is his will that each one should comply with the demands of that department in which his supreme hand has placed him. Whenever therefore, Christians, your time is taken up by the duties of your lawful calling, be that calling what it may, you may deem it well employed. For as the neglect of these relative duties is highly blamable and sinful, so is an exact and diligent compliance with them a proof of true devotion and solid piety. *Because, good servant, thou hast been faithful in smaller things, thou shalt enter into the joy of thy Lord.* Matt. 25.

I cannot, I own, dear people, cast my eyes upon your conduct in this respect without grief; nor comprehend how, instead of employ-
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ing your time in the discharge of these twofold obligations, you throw it away so lavishly on emptiness and trifles. Surely, you must be ignorant of its value. Instead of managing it with prudence, and improving the advantage it offers, your sole ambition seems to be to hasten its speed, and make it evaporate still more quickly. Is it thus you act, I repeat, my friends, in the concerns of the world, although every thing of the kind, in competition with your salvation, is most trivial and insignificant? To ensure success to your temporal affairs, each moment is turned to account; if a single one be lost, you are inconsolable; and however great your assiduity may be, you are still afraid of wanting time. But, when salvation is at stake, it hangs upon your hands, and you are only apprehensive of having a greater share of it than you know how to dispose of. Alas! brethren, the time will come when you shall see your error; and when, viewing things through their proper medium, your sentiments shall be extremely different on this article. The time will come, when we shall regret the days that we employ so ill at present, and our regret shall be useless. The time will come when we should be glad to give the world, if at our disposal, to recover some of those precious moments, which we now fool away so wantonly.

To-day, however, Christians, obeying the call of heaven, be advised to redeem the time that is spent by works of penance; and to endeavour to regain the past, by a right use of that which is present. So many years, let us say, we have wasted in idleness; and so few hours have we employed in the concerns of futurity. Nevertheless, the mercy of our God still affords us a remedy; which is to recollect, like the holy Ezechias, our lost years *in the bitterness of our soul*, and thus to recall and bring them back. Let us learn, my brethren, and may such be the effect of this exhortation; let us learn, I say, to manage our time. Let us redeem the past; let us take advantage of the present; and let us resolutely determine to apply the future to a proper use. How rich might we soon become were we thus provident? Not one of our actions that would not merit a reward; not a word, not a thought, not a motion that would not be deserving of eternal bliss; not an instant of our time that would not be worth a whole eternity. How precious the life thus devoted to the business of salvation! Every moment would exceed years, every day surpass the whole ages in real value. How great then, Christians, is our folly to refuse to enrich ourselves at so cheap a rate, to make our fortunes at so small an expense!

May the solemn truths which I have here announced to you, dear people, be ever present to your eyes, and engage you henceforward a pious use of that invaluable time which the Supreme Being may vouchsafe to grant you. Let us regret: attend, my friends, for the following is the only fruit I wish you to reap from this discourse; let us regret *the past*, by a sincere sorrow; let us cultivate *the present*, by an industrious diligence; let us anticipate *the future*, by that salutary fear which is productive of salvation. Long since have we merited

rited to be bereaved of this precious treasure ; because we have long been barren trees in the fruitful garden of the Church. But O Lord ! since it has pleased thy goodness still to preserve us, and still to afford us time, we will endeavour to profit by it, and to labour effectually in the acquisition of virtue, and the performance of all good works ; in the sweet confidence of receiving from thy hands the reward of a blissful immortality hereafter. Amen.

THE

T H E

FIFTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Forgiveness of Injuries.

Leave thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother. Matt. v. 4

NEVER does the Son of God express himself with greater firmness, or speak with more authority, than when he imposes on us the precept of not only loving our neighbours, but of being reconciled to our enemies. Let us weigh the terms, this adorable Saviour uses, to obviate the vain pretences, that self-love may suggest, to make us refuse obedience to his injunction. When he commands us to *leave our offering before the altar, &c.* he does not direct us so to do, only when we have any thing against our brother; but also when we recollect that *he hath any thing against us*. To know therefore that we have offended him, is a sufficient reason to be obliged to quit the altar: or if, according to the dictates of prudence, you ought not to interrupt the sacrifice, to go to one you may have injured; go to him, says St. Augustine, in mind at least, if not in person.

Add to this the cogent motives, Christ here proposes, to determine us to a full and entire reconciliation. The first of which is that our enemy is our brother; *go and be reconciled to thy brother*. The second, the punishment, with which he threatens us, in case of a refusal; *he shall be in danger of the judgment*. But let us enter into a
longer

longer detail of a subject, which may be considered as one of the most important of the Christian doctrine ; and heaven grant that I may see an end to all enmities among such, as profess the name of Christ. To do my part towards which, my friends, I will here endeavour to make you comprehend both the motives, and the rules of this most necessary branch of charity. First then, we must forgive : secondly, we must forgive cordially : two considerations, which if you ponder with attention, will make you sensible how short you fall of your duty in this respect. But first, let us direct our hearts to heaven, and implore the succour of its gracious influence.

To vindicate the law, that commands us to love our enemies ; and to inspire you with charitable sentiments in regard to those, that have offended you, it might suffice to tell you, brethren, what the prophets told the Jews, whenever they announced any thing distasteful to flesh and blood, *so says the Lord*. But I will do more ; and to convince you effectually that it is a matter of indispensable necessity to forgive your adversaries, I will shew you that the law, which enjoins this precept, is of all others the most clear, the most equitable and the most advantageous.

Is there, dear people, in the whole Gospel, a law more strongly marked, more universally recommended, or more enforced by menaces, than this I am speaking of ? *You have heard*, says Christ, *it hath been said to them of old ; thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies ; do good to them, that hate you ; pray for them, that persecute you.* Matt. v. 34. 44. Is there any obscurity in these words ? any room for cavilling ? Could he have expressed the obligation of forgiving your brethren more clearly, than by commanding you to love those very enemies, who have unjustly injured you ?

Christ has cleared up a law, which the Jews looked upon as obscure. Christ has assigned its true meaning to a law, which they misinterpreted. Christ, in the new Testament, has perfected a law, which was incomplete under the old. *I*, he says altogether God as I am, *I say to you, love your enemies*. Is not this sufficient to compel you to obedience ? It is God, that here commands ; it is God, who, to try your fidelity, tells you in a tone of authority, *love your enemies*. To such explicit orders, what have you to reply ? Did our blessed Saviour ever deliver himself in a style more firm or more majestic ? He speaks like a Sovereign ; *I say to you, love your enemies*. Nor does he content himself with explaining his intentions once ; he repeats the same injunction in almost every page. *Forgive*, he says, as often as there may be occasion : remit whatever your brother is indebted to you : be merciful : *by this shall all men know that you are my disciples.* John xiii. 35.

Moreover, he threatens the persons, who do not love their enemies, and refuse to pardon them, with the weight of his indignation ; *Judgment without mercy to him, that hath not done mercy*, James ii. 13. No, my friends, no ; God will never pardon your sins, unless

less you forgive your neighbour the offences, he may commit against you ; he will never receive you into his friendship, unless you receive your brother into your good graces ; he will be implacable in your regard, if you be inexorable to your fellow-creatures. Whatever other imaginable virtues you may be endued with, if you have a hard heart, a heart obstinately bent on not pardoning those, that offend you, look not for salvation. The sole alternative, you have, is to forgive, or to be lost. The gospel, by which you must be tried, affords no other.

O man ! proud man ! dust and ashes, as thou art ! stoop to a law, which the Deity has made both practicable by his grace, and just by his authority. For what, Christians, is there more equitable, than a law, whose purport is to procure for us the peaceable enjoyment of life ? Does not experience teach us that to be obstinate in refusing to make up matters, is the way to multiply our enemies ?

It is a certain fact, that, in this case, you will find people take pleasure in thwarting you, in watching your actions, in putting a wrong construction on them, without your well knowing wherefore ; and all that you can gain, says Tertullian, by resenting it, will be a real loss, in the sacrifice of our conscience and peace of mind.

Nevertheless, how usual a thing is it to take unreasonable exceptions ? Such a one, for instance, neglects to take off his hat to you, or says something, that gives offence : immediately you set him down as an enemy and an ill-wisher. But on what, I ask, is this rash judgment founded ? Must he feel the weight of your resentment, for having said or done something, in which perhaps malevolence had not the smallest share ? But even allowing the injury to be real, is it your business to revenge it ? has not the Lord reserved this right to himself ? and is it not a crying injustice for you to fly in the face of his command ? A just command, and which establishes an exact proportion between you and your opponent. To-day your brother offends you, and may not you perhaps to-morrow offend him, and stand in need of that indulgence, which is now solicited in his favour ? Do you think that, if you suffer from others, others do not suffer equally from you ? Have not all mankind their humours, their caprices, their defects ? You complain of your brethren and their injustice : how often have you given them cause to make similar complaints of you ? Would you like to be reproached with the spiteful thing, you have said of them ; with your biting railleries ; with the secret steps you have taken, to humble, and to cross them in their affairs ? Be then but candid, Christians ; if you find the law, that enjoins the forgiveness of injuries, so equitable, when it orders others to pardon you the grossest insults ; can you, without the most glaring inconsistency, deem the same law unjust, when it lays the like obligation on you, in their regard ?

To shew the great advantages, that result from the forgiveness of injuries, I will not here mention the mischief, that arises to particular
bodies

bodies of people, and even to whole kingdoms, from a spirit of animosity and rancour. For without recurring to human principles, ought not the sole profession of Christianity to be sufficiently forcible to disarm your vengeance? Ye children of mount Calvary! disciples of the gospel! open the sacred volumes, by which we must be tried, and you will there read your condemnation, in every page almost; and this, not only if you will not pardon, but also, if you refuse to love your enemies, after the example of your Saviour. In one passage, you are taught that your offering will not be acceptable, unless you *first go and be reconciled*. In another, you are informed that God will measure his mercy to you by that, which you yourselves shew to others; *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*. Every where, you are apprized that your sins will not be forgiven, unless you forgive; *I say not till seven times, but till seventy times seven times*. Matt. xviii. 22.

So far then from complaining of the severity of the law, which obliges us to pardon them, that we are at variance with; rather let us admire the advantages, it holds out to us. *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven*. Luke vi. 37. Where, my friends, is the difficulty of this divine injunction? or what excuse can you allege for not obeying it? Neither weakness of constitution, nor multiplicity of business can justify your non-compliance; since neither health nor time is wanted to accomplish it; all that is required being a sincere will and a good resolution, of which you should always be the masters.

Confess therefore, brethren, that you are highly criminal, when you refuse to forgive. Blush at your want of a christian spirit; and resolve to imitate those generous martyrs, who, in the opinion of the Fathers, manifested their courage more conspicuously by pardoning injuries, than by suffering death; who prayed for the authors of their torments, and addressed their vows to heaven for their very executioners. They were men, as you are: when will you forgive, as they did?

It is Christ himself that commands us to pardon: and he likewise himself shall serve as a model, to shew us how to pardon in a proper manner. In the first place then, I say, we must forgive our enemies, as Christ forgives us: and in the second, we must forgive them, as he forgave his executioners and most implacable enemies.

The perfection of a Christian consists in bearing a resemblance to his God. Now in what respect can he resemble him the most? in forgiving injuries. *Love your enemies; says Christ, do good to them that hate you; that you may be the children of your heavenly Father*; Matt. v. 44. But I will endeavour to point out to you more particularly, dear people, in what manner the Lord acts in your regard; that you may know how to act in relation to your adversaries. Rebellious as we are, he bears with us. He anticipates us. Nor is this sufficient. He waits for us; and, after having long expected, he receives us, whenever we are willing to return to him.

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First, God has born with us: and when? at the very time, when regardless of his voice, we raised the standard of rebellion in opposition to his claims. What would have been our fate, dear Christians, had he then followed the impulse of his justice? Secondly, not only does he bear with, but he anticipates us. Notwithstanding he is our Sovereign, he vouchsafes to invite and to recall us. He does not spare his paternal solicitude; and one would rather think that he was desirous to obtain some favour of us, than that he offered us a pardon. Thirdly, he awaits us. Astonishing prodigy of his love! for if *he waiteth*, says the Prophet, it is *that he may have mercy on us*. Is. xxx. 18. Our ungrateful delays do not disgust him; he seems resolved to set aside the demands of his justice, that he may judge his mercy without restraint. And fourthly, he gives us a still stronger evidence of his affection: for as soon as we become sensible of our misery, he stretches out his arms to us, and lavishes his gifts upon us with redoubled profusion. An alteration of the heart suffices to erase the past, and to re-establish us fully in his good graces.

Can we, my friends, flatter ourselves with the idea of pardoning our enemies as the Deity pardons us? First, as I have said, he bears with us. Do we bear with them that do us any injury? rather do we not break out into invectives and harsh words? do we not try to make others espouse our quarrels and our enmities? Secondly, God anticipates us: he is the first to recall and seek us. Is our comportment such in regard to our adversaries? We consent to an accommodation; but we are unwilling to take the first step towards it. I am the party offended, you say; it is not my business to forward in making advances. There are circumstances, I own, in which religion does not oblige us to be beforehand in acts of civility with the persons that have ill-used us. But observe, Christians, this can seldom be your case; and as each of you thinks himself injured, neither of you can keep back with any propriety. Besides, to be obliged to take the first step, although you should be the party offended even, it is enough that your indifference gives scandal. Thirdly, God waits for us. Is any thing further requisite to confound those revengeful spirits, that on the slightest affront demand satisfaction, and pretend to exact the most demeaning concessions? Fourthly, in fine, he stretches out his arms to us as soon as we return to him. Do we copy this divine model? Has any one made an unsuccessful attempt in regard to his enemy? He quickly gives it up; I have done my part, he says; such a one does not deserve to be forgiven. But I ask you, brethren; after so many crimes as your conscience may reproach you with, did you merit the pardon of your sins which you have received? I ask you if you can hope to be saved, while you act in contradiction to your model and legislator; who teaches, and commands you to forgive without measure, without bounds? Let us try ourselves by these rules, and reform our prejudices.

prejudices. *As the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also.* Coloss. iii. 13. On this head, the gospel exhibits a remarkable instance for our direction. Jesus Christ tells us of a servant, who, oppressed with the weight of his debts, and prostrate at his master's feet, implores a delay of payment: in consequence of which, he obtains not only the favour he sues for, but also a total discharge. After so affecting a proof of benevolence, he meets with a fellow-servant, who was indebted to him; though for a trifle, in comparison with the sum which he himself had owed to his Lord. He demands immediate payment; and throws the other, who could not then satisfy him, into prison. But his barbarous cruelty does not long remain unpunished. The master, informed of his vile behaviour, immediately recalls his words, and gives him up to the ministers of justice. And so likewise, says Christ, *shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.* Matt. xviii. 35. You will be treated as you treat your neighbour. If you hate him, God will hate you. If you seek his ruin, God will seek yours. As you behave to him, so God will behave to you. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do to you.*

Alas! dear people, what answer will you be able to make, when the Almighty shall say to you, as his Lord to the above miscreant, *I forgave thee all the debt, shouldst not thou then have compassion on thy fellow servant?* What excuse will you then offer? Shall it be the magnitude of the offence? but were you ever so ill used by others, he will reply, as I have been by you? Nevertheless, I overlooked it. And what has been your conduct? You have indulged your resentment; you have made it a point to denounce vengeance; and the like rule I will now observe in the decision of your doom. You have often said to me; *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*; and you shall be heard. You did not pardon; no more will I then. I will demand the whole debt. No forgiveness for him, who would not forgive. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do to you.*

Follow me, ye revengeful Christians! exclaimed St. Augustine, heretofore; come to mount Calvary; fix your eyes on the cross of Christ; and learn from his deportment the manner, in which you should love your enemies. *Father!* he cries out, *forgive them.* But for whom does he intercede? for those, who are even then in the act of putting him to a most inhuman and unjust death. He prays for them, at the very time they are triumphing over his apparent weakness. He excuses them, *they know not what they do*, Luke xxiii. 34. and offers up the very blood, which he is spilling, for the pardon of their crimes. But is it for them alone he petitions? Is it not for you also, ye vindictive spirits! who are perhaps equally insensible to his example and to his love? His blood, this same blood, that solicits the divine mercy in your behalf, implores it also for your enemies.

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Let us frequent the school of Christ, my friends, and there learn the practice of that charity, which he came principally to teach. He loved his enemies, he prayed for them. Can we refuse to imitate him? Interrogate your hearts, and let them be your vouchers. From the time your adversaries forsook the path of virtue, have they been the objects of your zeal? Can you say that you are grieved at their unhappiness, or that you offer up your prayers for their conversion? Where are the sighs you send to heaven in their behalf? And are you not obligated so to do, after the example Christ has given you? He is your Master, your God, your Saviour. Was he content with merely pardoning? Satiated with ignominy, drenched with gall, suspended on a cross, did he simply forget the barbarity of his persecutors? Did he not pray for, suffer for, and even die for them?

If there be any of you, Christians, that still remain unconvinced, as to the obligation of forgiving, and the manner, in which you should forgive: if all that I have said be lost upon you; let such, (if any such there be I say) behold their God struggling with death. Will they value the master no more than his minister? Shall the sight of him be as ineffectual as my words? Behold, ye implacable men! your Redeemer fastened to a cross, his hands and feet pierced with nails. What was it impelled him to submit to this extremity of torments, but his desire to satisfy his Father's justice for your sins? Was he disposed to pursue you with that hatred, with which you pursue your neighbour, for some pretended injury or other, where would you now be? In hell, the victims of an unquenchable fire. But no, dear brethren, I will judge more favourably of you, and believe that you are determined to copy your divine model Jesus Christ; that you will not let the day pass without endeavouring to effect a reconciliation with whoever may have injured you; and that you are now doing in your hearts what you purpose to do by word of mouth, as soon as possible. Moreover, it is advisable that they, who have been privy to your enmities, should be made witnesses to your reconciliation; that, as they have been scandalized at the one, they may be edified by the other. These are the most effectual measures, you can resort to, to obtain peace in this life and happiness in the next. Amen.

T H E

SIXTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Spiritual Works of Mercy.

I have compassion on the multitude. Mark viii. 2.

THE gospel of this Sunday, brethren, affords me an opportunity of expatiating on the interesting article of providence; and of shewing you, in order to excite your confidence, that we are in the hands of a God, to whom all things are subjected; of a God, who commands his sun to shine upon the wicked, as upon the just; of a God, in short, with whose *mercy the earth is filled*. However, as I may hereafter have occasion to entertain you on this matter, I shall not touch upon it at present. But, instead of it, I will lay before you a subject of instruction, no less necessary, drawn from those tender words of our amiable Saviour, which form my text; *I have compassion on the multitude*; endeavouring to kindle in your hearts the love of your neighbour, and awaken you to his wants.

I mean then here, I say, for your information, to elucidate a point, which, although particularized in the rudiments of religion, has never, perhaps, made a sufficient impression upon your minds: viz. that of the works of charity, which we are bound to practise, there are two kinds; the one spiritual, the other corporal: The corporal works of mercy consist in feeding, in clothing, in lodging the necessitous and in lending them a prompt and efficacious hand,

hand, under the various pressures of their condition. Happy the persons, whom the bounty of a gracious Deity has empowered to do this effectually ! But as this is a blessing, which falls only to the lot of *the few* comparatively ; and as it is decreed that the fate of *us all* must be determined by the article of benevolence towards our brethren ; our divine Redeemer, ever attentive to procure for us the means of salvation, (in defect of our ability to comply with the precept of corporal alms) prescribes, in regard to our neighbour, alms of another sort, the obligation of which is universal and indispensable. I mean spiritual alms-deeds ; which consist in instructing the ignorant, correcting sinners, giving counsel to the doubtful, comforting the afflicted, bearing the defects of others patiently, and being animated with zeal for the salvation of all mankind, and holding out to them the attractive light of good example. Such, Christians, is the subject, which I design at present to set before you, for your edification. May your instructions correspond with my wishes ; and may the Sovereign Being contribute his favourable assistance towards it, through the mediation of his beloved Son, as we will previously implore.

The first of the works of mercy spiritual, that you are obliged, to practice, dear people, is to instruct your ignorant neighbour, either by yourselves, or by the means of others. St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, that amidst the variety of his labours and sufferings he had announced to them a sound and pure doctrine, with the sole view of pleasing God, without interest, without flattery, without an eye to any human respects whatever : that he had treated them with the like attention as a parent would his children, exhorting them, consoling them, and conjuring them to behave themselves in a manner worthy of the God they served, and of the happiness, for which they were candidates. The same Apostle thus appeals to the people of Ephesus ; *you know how I have kept back nothing that could be profitable ; but have preached it to you, and taught you publicly, and from house to house.* Acts xx. 20. With a like zeal, with a similar benevolence you, my friends, should communicate to each other the lights you have received from God, and the instructions you may have learnt.

But on you, Parents and Superiors ! is this duty of informing the ignorant peculiarly incumbent. Fathers and Mothers ! you are indispensably obliged to instruct your children ; and you, Masters and Mistresses, your servants, in the dictates of our divine religion. If you are incapable of doing it by your own means, to fulfil this duty of charity, which you owe to them, you are bound to send them to the house of God for catechism, &c. ; which point the person, that neglects, detains the truth in captivity, as St. Paul expresses it, and is *worse than a beaten* ; nay *he hath denied his faith*, he says, and apostatized. 1 Tim. v. 8.

The next thing, which this spiritual mercy claims of us, is to admonish sinners, and, if possible, to open their eyes to the error

of their ways. Although finners, they do not cease to be our brethren; and as such, the crimes, that lay them open to the judgments of the Deity, ought to excite our compassion. Alas! dear Christians, what object can there be more deserving of our pity, than to see our fellow-members sporting heedless under the naked sword of the divine justice? We see it with the eyes of the body, because we are but too often witnesses to their sins: we see it with the eyes of faith, which discovers to us, in their wickedness, the greatness of their misery. The view of the corporal necessities of the wretched, especially if they be allied to us, inclines us to succour them as soon as possible: and shall not religion prompt us to redress their spiritual grievances, if in our power.

But to correct your brother wait, Christian! till a favourable opportunity presents itself, and till, the heat of passion being subsided, there may be reasonable grounds to hope for success. Without which precaution, this duty of charity will only be the occasion of anger and violence, through the indiscretion of your zeal. Whilst, on the contrary, watching your opportunity, and treating the errors of your neighbour with that tenderness and lenity, with which you would be glad to have your own follies handled, you will gain him to Christ, and thus complete the most honourable of all conquests.

And be not here imposed upon, my friends. You, who for good and lawful reasons may be exempted from giving corporal alms, are not forthwith dispensed with from the spiritual works of charity, that I am treating of. You have met with losses, you are burthened with children, you have scarcely wherewithal to support yourselves. This is too true, I know, with respect to many; and, in regard to such, it must be granted that the injunction of temporal alms is by no means binding. But, does your brother commit an atrocious deed before your face? do your children live in a state of open profligacy? In any case of this nature, the precept of correction reaches you. If you do not reprove them; if you neglect any measure requisite to reclaim them to their duty, you become culpable in the eye of God; who declares to you, by his Prophet, that he will *require their blood* and their souls *at your hands*. Ezech. iii. 18.

The principal impediment to any good effect in this matter, is, that impatience, resentment and hatred too usually blend themselves with the office of fraternal correction. To render it available, strive to convince your brother that you have his good at heart, and are solely actuated by the desire of his welfare. For if charity be your guide, you will not fail to pursue the method, which Christ himself prescribes. You will admonish the guilty party in private, before you will apply to his Superiors. *If he will not hear thee,* says St. Matthew, *take with thee one or two more*. Matt. xviii. 16. and if he still remains incorrigible; then, in the name of God, inform those, who may have it in their power to redress the evil.

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Instead of which, the order of heaven, in affairs of this nature, is in general totally subverted. Because people seek to indulge their animosity, and gratify their spleen; and in lieu of a spirit of charity, under the cloak of correction, conceal the foul and empoisoned shafts of rancour, malice, and revenge.

A similar prudence is required in the execution of the next in succession of these meritorious works. It is an office of mercy highly pleasing, no doubt, to God and beneficial to our neighbour, to give wholesome advice to such, as stand in need of it. But no little discretion will be requisite so to qualify and temper it, that it may produce the desired effect, and operate to a good purpose. Such was the conduct observed by the Prophet Nathan towards David, in making him acquainted with his crime; a conduct, that to this day calls forth our admiration, and should serve us for a model. You see a neighbour plunging himself headlong into difficulties. That lawsuit, which he is intent upon, will be his ruin, and entail destruction on his distressed family: charity demands of you to dissuade him from it, if you can, and lay before him all its consequences. You have long since apprehended that credulous young woman was likely to fall a victim to the artful promises of a man, without principles, without morals, without probity: in charity, represent to her the imminent danger, that threatens her, both as to her honour and salvation. You behold others at variance and enmity: be it your part to try to reconcile them, and to terminate the differences, which so long have disunited them, to the scandal perhaps of all, that know them. For having it in your power to do these good works, if you omit them, you become criminal in the sight of God, who exacts of you, as a duty, to direct your misguided brethren by your counsel.

But the matter does not stop here, dear Christians. There are many other good works, which you are called upon to practise, as occasion may offer. You must uphold, you must support, you must solace your neighbour in his distress. This truth St. Paul was desirous to instil into the Thessalonians, when he told them to *comfort one another; and we beseech you, brethren, he adds, rebuke the unquiet, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, and be patient towards all men* 1 Thess. v. 11. He expresses to the Colossians the affection, he had for those, whom he had never seen; how he longed to *console, and instruct them in charity*. Your neighbour is devoured by grief and melancholy; he is a prey to the most corroding anguish of either mind or body; sustain him, encourage him in his afflictions, strengthen him under his trials, by opening to his view the prospect of the rewards, promised to them, that persevere. Do not contradict him, like the friends of Job, those proverbial comforters: who, instead of alleviating, only served to aggravate his misery.

Is your brother in affliction then? Be not insensible to him, says the Apostle, since you are members of the same body; and when
one

one member suffers, all should sympathize. Wipe away his tears, rouse his despondency, and strive to render easy to him, by a charitable conduct, all the difficulties he may experience in the pursuit of virtue. Exact not of him, who, perhaps, is but a novice in the duties of religion, what you might expect from one more conversant in its trammels. In fine, let your consolations be mutual, in this vale of tears, in which the occasions of suffering are daily shooting up. Follow the advice of the Holy Ghost, who tells you to *insult no one, whose soul is in bitterness; for there is a God, who beholds all things; and he it is that exalteth*. Eccclus. vii. 12. *Be not wanting therefore in comforting them, that weep; and walk with them, that mourn; ib.* nor fail to mitigate their sorrows by the unction of your words, and by the delicacy and kindness of your behaviour.

Such is the advice, which St. Paul inculcates on the Galatians, in order to make them children, worthy of the common parent Jesus Christ. *Bear ye one another's burthens: so you shall fulfil the law of Christ*. Gal. vi. 2. And such, my friends, must our comportment be in the different departments and occurrences of life. Some or other of you men present, who are engaged in the matrimonial state, may perhaps have a wife, that is froward, passionate, or a bad manager: let your mildness reclaim her, and make her sensible of the injury, she does your family, by the irregularity of her conduct. And among you married women, there may possibly be one or more, that is tied to a drunken, choleric, reprobate husband: endeavour like St. Monica, to reform him by your kindness. Never reprove him when he is in a passion, or in liquor; but wait patiently for the return of his reason; and even then, as much as possible, shun every subject, that may carry with it a probability of inflaming him.

True charity is insinuating, and strives to win the affections of those, whom it desires to lead to virtue; ever studious not to hurt their feelings by hastiness or acrimony. Yes, dear people, a Christian, sincerely actuated by the spirit of charity, although he will in no degree relax from the rules of the gospel, endeavours to render them amiable: and directing his attention to the heart of those, whom he wishes to draw to Christ, gains them over like the great Apostle; who, by every artifice of an industrious zeal triumphed sometimes by his patience, and sometimes by his condescension; becoming all to all, as he himself says, that he might *save all*. He declares to the Corinthians that he labours only for their sakes; that they engross his affections, and that he bears them in his mind incessantly. Be convinced then, Christians, that unless you gain the heart, your endeavours will be fruitless. Imitate the conduct of the Deity, who, when he pleases to convert a sinner, holds out to him every attraction, that may engage his love. If your zeal be bitter, it will be barren also. If at the bottom there be a spirit of contention, glory not, says St. James,
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in your wisdom ; for *this is not a wisdom descending from above ; but earthly, sensual and diabolical.* James iii. 15.

Finally, the last, and at the same time the best method, I shall mention of exercising your charity towards your brethren, and to effect their salvation, is to give them good example. This is a work of mercy, which, whilst it is the most universal in its extent, is also the most efficacious in its operations. For this reason St. Paul recommends to the Romans so pressingly to do good, not only before God, but also in the sight of men. With this point, brethren, I shall conclude : and as it is a matter so momentous, let me here entreat you to redouble your attention. It is not sufficient then that a Christian be guiltless in the sight of God ; he must moreover be justified in the eyes of men, according to the Apostle. It will not suffice to be irreproachable at the bar of the Divinity ; we must likewise be uncensurable at the tribunal of mankind, to whom the duty of edification and good example is at all times owing. For which reason charity obliges you, first,

Never to do any thing evil, any thing prohibited by the laws of either God or man, in the presence of your neighbour ; otherwise you become murderers ; you destroy those souls, for which their and your Redeemer shed the last drop of his sacred blood. *Through thy knowledge, St. Paul says, shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died.* Cor. viii. 11. At your hands will the Lord demand the souls of these unhappy victims to your scandal.

Secondly, to avoid giving them any occasion of offence, by the open commission of sin, is not sufficient. Here again, my brethren, you must follow the advice of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. *From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves.* 1 Thess. v. 22. You are known, for instance, to frequent the company of a person in the neighbourhood : your connection may possibly be innocent : still, if it affords a plea to unfavourable judgments, you must break it off. For you are bound not only to abstain from evil, but *from all appearance* of it. The freedom of your conversation, and the levity of your carriage bring your virtue under suspicion. You must be more reserved in your words, more guarded in your behaviour ; otherwise you may give occasion to sin, of which a Christian should avoid the *very appearance*. Your tepidity in the concerns of salvation, your remissness in the time of public prayer, that heedless air, you bring with you to the celebration of the divine mysteries and instructions ; these, and many things similar diminish your neighbour's ardour, and tend manifestly to warp him. Whatever be the fault therefore correct it. For a Christian is bound to watch over all his actions with such attention, as may preclude even the semblance of harm ; *from all appearance of evil refrain yourselves.*

I go still further, my friends, and assert that you are not only obligated to refrain *from all appearance of evil* ; but that you are bound to give up many things, which in themselves are indifferent and allowable, if they prove a stumbling block to your neighbour ;
according

according to that rule of the Apostle; *All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify.* 1 Cor. x. 23.

Nay, even good works themselves; but comprehend me rightly, Christians; (such works I mean as are usually styled works of supererogation, and which are not of precept) are sometimes to be omitted on the supposition I here speak of; that is to say, if the performance of them be attended with scandal to your neighbour. For charity is uniformly edifying, and so likewise should be the whole tenour of our actions; as St. Paul again testifies, when he says, *let all things be done for edification.* 1 Cor. xiv. 26. For example, you are censured for what may appear very laudable in itself; I mean for spending a great part of your time in prayer, while your children are neglected, and your work left undone. In this case, let me advise you to attend to the business of your station, and to regulate your devotions suitably. But take notice, brethren; if the observance of the duties of *obligation*, such as being present at the divine service on Sundays and Holidays, frequenting the sacraments, sending your children to catechising, &c. if the observance, I say, of these obligatory duties be a subject of scandal to any one, such a censure would only deserve to be disregarded; since it would be an offence unjustly taken; a scandal similar to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who misconstrued every action of our Redeemer, howsoever warranted.

In short, my dear people, charity calls upon you to give your neighbour a personal example of all virtues; to supply him with a model in your conversation, and in your conduct. *Be an example to the faithful,* says St. Paul, *and let your modesty be known to all men; for the Lord is nigh.* Phil. iv. 5. There is no quality so amiable, none so edifying, and which so powerfully stimulates to good, as this of modesty, the genuine offspring of charity and benevolence. For as the former of these sublime virtues directs the sentiments of the mind, and the affections of the heart; so the latter cannot fail to be productive of a like effect upon our words, our actions and our whole exterior. Modesty originates in a certain goodness of disposition, which willingly yields, and waves its right in favour of its neighbour; it bears a great deal, without transgressing the limits of equity and moderation; and retrenches from its actions and from its sentiments every thing improper, every thing that may have a tendency to wound, or hurt its fellow-creatures. Henceforth then, my friends, conduct yourselves as beings formed to the image of the Most High. As members of Jesus Christ, be influenced by his spirit. As children of God, walk on steadily in the path of righteousness. After the example of St. Paul, turn every stone, put every method in execution, and spare nothing to gain souls to the service of the Deity. Should you be so happy as to make although but one sole conquest for him, by the works of mercy, that I have been recommending, you may hope to find hereafter a powerful friend to introduce you into the eternal tabernacles. Amen.

T H E
SEVENTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On H E L L.

Every tree, that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. Matt. vii. 19.

SUCH, brethren, is the declaration of unerring truth, a declaration, that I mean to expatiate on, for your entertainment to-day; and if I design to alarm you, it is not to cast you into despair, but to contribute my best endeavours towards the work of your conversion. *Every tree, says Christ, that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire.*

Alas! my friends, have you ever weighed maturely the grievousness of the punishment, with which God threatens wicked Christians, represented by the trees here mentioned? *They shall be cast into the fire.* But oh! what a fire! a fire, the serious view of which has struck terror into the most hardened, and brought back the most abandoned to the path of virtue.

To frame some idea, (although no human conception is able to form a just one) of the punishments of hell, figure to yourselves a vast and immensely deep cavity, filled with fire, with inflamed and glowing brimstone; which the Apocalypse terms *the bottomless pit*. In these abodes of horror, in this land of malediction is the sinner's final residence. Here the Deity, intent on vengeance, pours in liquid streams of *burning pitch* and sulphur. Here the wicked are fastened down with *chains of fire*; whilst the spirit of terror howls around them.

them. Ah! Christians, how tremendous a thing it is to fall into the hands of this avenging God! Let us descend to-day, in spirit, into these mansions of endless woe. Now is the time to do it with profit. Let us view the greatness of the péril, that we hitherto have been, and still are exposed to, and ascend gradually to the knowledge of the various torments of this seat of retribution. These I now propose to lay before you, by the help of that celestial grace, whose benign influence we will here solicit.

In beginning it, my brethren, I must confess that I can give you but a very faint idea of the melancholy subject now before us. But however short my endeavours may fall, I will do my best to delineate to you the wretched condition of the damned in hell.

And first, they are separated from whatsoever had once been dear to them. Represent to yourselves a person, such as described by the gospel, (who has but to command, and who to good living adds every pleasure his heart can suggest) on a sudden cited by death, without having had time to arrange his accounts; he is tried, condemned and plunged into the abyss of hell. What a dreadful calamity! For observe, Christians, the dispositions, death shall find us in, are never to be altered. If we be so unhappy as to die in a state of impenitence, we must continue impenitent throughout eternity; i. e. bound with the very fetters, that shall have linked us so inseparably to the world. Conceive then, if you are able, the distress of such a soul, on seeing itself suddenly torn from all the attachments it had in life. A separation so much the more painful, as it loses sight for ever of what it was desirous to possess eternally: an universal separation, in which it is divorced from every creature. Ushered into this land of darkness, it finds nothing but its sins, and their just punishment.

Oh! dismal condition of the sinner! and what must add to his misery is that he cannot obliterate this separation from his mind. In our present state, the deepest impressions wear away: time effaces every thing. But in hell there is no time: its griefs are without cure: inasmuch, my friends, that whoever shall die under the guilt of any vicious inclination, shall regret for all eternity the loss of his empty pleasures. He shall exclaim incessantly with the impious Agag; is it thus, O bitter death! thou dost cut me off from all I loved?

But here, dear people, follows a second torment. Carry your thoughts as far as they can reach; and still I will be bold to say, that you are unequal to comprehend the misfortune of a soul, that has lost her God. Nay, I will venture to affirm, that were we able to conceive how great an evil the loss of God is, we should be as wretched as the damned themselves: since they alone, who experience it, can know it thoroughly. Fatal necessity! cries out St. Cyril, to be deprived of the Sovereign good, from whom every happiness must flow. This is a loss without remedy, a separation without hope.

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And herein chiefly consists the grievousness of this punishment. Judge of it by a comparison. St. Paul, about to quit the Milesians, thus addresses himself to them. My beloved children ! to whom I have so often announced the mysteries of Christ, I must bid you farewell ; the time is come, in which you must take your leave of Paul, your father, your friend, your teacher. *I know you shall see my face no more.* Acts xx. 25. At these words, says the holy penman, the sorrow was general : every heart sobbed, every eye shed tears ; while *falling on his neck, they kissed him.* ib. 37. Their eager looks shewed their wish to detain the vessel, that waited for him ; and their dejected silence expressed their grief *for the word which he had said, that they should see his face no more.* ib. 38.

Now, do you think, my brethren, that if the Christians of Miletus thus bewailed the absence of Paul, the reprobate will not be inconsolable for the loss of their God ? For after all, the former had the prospect of again meeting their friend in glory : whilst the latter are conscious that every shadow of hope is vanished. When the Almighty Judge shall have pronounced those decisive words, I am no longer your God, nor you my people, *you shall not see my face,* Gen. xliii. 5. no power shall reverse them. In vain shall these unhappy wretches call out, *show us thy face, O Lord !* and we shall be satisfied. No other answer to their cries, but that thunder, with which hell shall eternally resound, *depart from me, ye cursed.*

At present, we are but little apprehensive of this eternal privation of the Sovereign good. We hear it spoken of without concern. But when the obscurity of faith shall be removed ; when the wicked shall see God distinctly in all his majesty ; shall perceive that he is the centre of every thing desirable ; and shall behold themselves deprived of this God, and all imaginable good with him ; who shall express, or even comprehend the least part of their grief ? Unfortunate sinner ! how bitter will be thy anguish when, in spite of thyself, thou shalt see that, whatever can render the possession of thy God infinitely to be wished for, is taken from thee, and that thou shalt have no other knowledge of the Deity, than what may serve to make thee rue his loss ? Oh direful calamity ! a calamity so much the more insupportable, as thou shalt be forced to confess thyself to be the sole author of thy own damnation.

This punishment the reprobate shall feel the more severely, as they shall compare the immense happiness, they are now deprived of, with the fading pleasures, they once enjoyed. Hence the involuntary recollection of their past iniquities, that shall force itself upon them. In this world, what a pile of sins do we every day accumulate. Tell the truth, my friends ; what oaths ! what obscenities ! what sacrileges ! and if you have been ignorant of it hitherto, be informed at least now that all these things are stored up in the treasury of God's wrath. Such then is the sad cause of the sinner's desolation ; the clear and distinct view of his offences, and the reproaches, which his conscience makes him on their head. During his life, he
would

would not give himself the trouble to look into his interior, but turned his eyes from his most glaring crimes. In hell however, *the wicked shall see*; he shall behold his abominations rising up against him, and reminding him perpetually of his ingratitude: *he shall see* the blindness of his understanding, the obduracy of his heart: he shall see the infidel and the idolater converted, and substituted in his stead in Abraham's bosom; whilst he, who had a special right to the inheritance of bliss, shall be cast into exterior darkness.

Oh! fight! what a source of sorrow shalt thou be to him! *The wicked shall see, and shall be angry; he shall gnash his teeth and pine away.* Ps. cxi. 10. Hence his rage and despair; his outrageous blasphemies against God and his imprecations on himself. Still there might appear a glimpse of comfort, could he say he had not brought this distress upon his own head. But, what a cutting reflection to perceive, beyond a doubt, that he has plunged himself voluntarily, and with the fullest deliberation, into the gulph where he is now tormented? It is thou, wretched sinner! shall he say, that hast brought thyself to this horrid pass. Thy God wished to save thee, *and thou wouldst not*: for a momentary gratification thou chosest rather to perish, than ensure to thyself the never ending possession of the greatest of all blessings. Oh inexhaustible fund of despair!

But what, dear people, shall we think, if, carrying our eyes yet further, we take a view of the devouring fire of this sulphurated furnace? Open your gates, ye dreary dungeons! and you, unhappy victims! come forth and shew yourselves. But no; you must remain where you are, environed with the merciless flames yourselves have kindled; your state is unalterable. What is it I behold however in this place of woe? Can I speak, or you, Christians, hear it without horror? Millions of the human race bound fast with chains of fire; of a fire, that acts on the mind, as on the body; a fire, that burns without consuming; a fire, that by the omnipotence of an avenging Deity, preserves the criminals, it punishes; a fire, that pierces into the inmost souls of the reprobate, to make them suffer the most excruciating torments, the provoked justice of a God can heap upon them.

Represent to yourselves the ardent flames, that heretofore devoured those execrable towns, Sodom and Gomorrha. Figure the glowing furnaces of Babylon, whose impetuous blaze struck the beholders with amazement. This, and every thing of the kind, is but a faint image of the fire of hell. For know, my brethren, was the fire of hell like that, we see on earth, this *burning pool*, as the Scripture terms it, might be deemed a place of comfort, in comparison with what it is in effect. Our fire falls off by degrees, or at least soon consumes whatever it is applied to: the fire of hell, besides being inextinguishable, has the quality to preserve those it burns; whence in the language of the sacred text, they *shall be salted with fire*. Our fire is luminous, and beautiful to the eye; that of hell black and obscure, increasing the gloom, instead of dissipating it. Our fire
causes

causes but a partial pain ; that of hell occasions to each part of the body at once every misery, of which it is susceptible. In fine, our fire is a grant of God's bounty ; but the fire of hell is the terrible effect of his enraged justice ; the tremendous instrument of his wrath and vengeance. From all this, my friends, what can I infer, but that you do not reflect on hell as you ought ? for surely no one can think of the fire of hell seriously, and at the same time yield to sin.

But there are still other torments in reserve for the reprobate, among which the felicity of the elect is not the least. Ah ! what an aggravation of their despair to behold the virtuous at the summit of happiness, while they themselves are reduced to the lowest ebb of misery ? Witness the rich man mentioned in St. Luke, ch. 16. who, *lifting up his eyes*, sees the indigent Lazarus, that a little while before had begged at his gate. But where does he see him ? *In the bosom of Abraham*. He sees but little : but he sees enough to become a prey to the most corroding envy. He suffers as much from the sight of heaven and its delights, as from the fire of hell with its dreadful tortures. The like shall be the fate of all the damned. The bliss of the Saints shall augment their misery. Those are they, will they say, whose edifying lives *we fools esteemed madness*. Wis. v. 3. There they are, in those mansions of delight and happiness. If, instead of following the dictates of corrupt nature, we had obeyed the gospel and its ministers, like them we might have now been happy in the inheritance of God's children. Oh paradise ! whose true value we know too late, shall we never then possess thee ?

To this gloomy regret, brethren, add their horrible maledictions and enormous blasphemies. For no sooner shall their eyes be opened to what they have lost, than they shall burst into the most severe reproaches against the authors of their damnation. Ye parents ! who occasion your childrens ruin by your bad example or neglect, expect to hear these same children load you with the most shocking imprecations. Ye sensualists ! whose only study is to corrupt innocence, and who, to gain your ends, are now so lavish of fine speeches, expect to find in hell those tender protestations turned into expressions of abhorrence.

In short, Christians, what shall I say to give you at least some idea of the state of the damned sinner ? He is a victim, destined to feel, without ceasing, the vengeful arm of an implacable Deity : he is a wretch universally abhorred, on whom all nature declares war : he is a criminal, whose sole resource is despair ; an useless despair, that can only tend to complete his misery. No, dear friends ; no description can be equal to the severity of his dreadful fate. Hell, says Tertullian, is a collection of all the torments, that the fury of an insulted God can afflict. It is the seal, so to speak, of God's wrath, the complement of his vengeance. And of what
continuance

continuance is it to be? For an eternity. This is the last, and I may add, the most tremendous of all its terrors.

Here, merciful God! who at present dost compassionate our failings, as a tender parent; but who ere long wilt treat us with so much rigour, as an exorable judge; for the conversion both of the pastor and the flock, enable me to paint the eternity of thy vengeance in those strong colours, that have frequently been productive of the most happy changes. But what am I soliciting? Reason in this matter is useless. Eternity of sufferings! immensity of ages! duration without end! who shall comprehend thee?

In fact, dear people, the imagination is here bewildered. We may say of eternity, as of God; that it is better understood from a description of what it is not, than of what it is. What then is this eternity, which we have so much cause to dread? Is it a circle, as the ancients represented it? But a circle, replies St. Basil, has both a beginning and an end; whereas eternity has neither. Is it a vast assemblage of ages, succeeding one another? But in any number of ages, how multiplied soever, there is always a something past, and a something to come; whereas in eternity, says St. Augustine, there is no past, no future, but every thing is present. Is it the sum of all possible duration? but eternity has no limits. What then again is this dreadful eternity? I answer with St. Augustine; carry your thoughts of it as high as you can, and you will still fall short of its reality.

However, Christians, to give you an imperfect idea of it, figure to yourselves a mountain as big as the whole world: was the smallest pebble taken from it at the close of every century, this enormous mass would be reduced to nothing, before eternity would commence. Imagine the whole earth covered with water as in the time of the deluge: was a single drop dried up at the end of each million of years, this vast expanse of water would at last be drained; but eternity is inexhaustible. In fine, collect in your imagination all the grains of sand, which the earth and sea can furnish; double, multiply them as long as you please: of this immensity of particles, innumerable as it is, you may single out the last; but are unable to discover the final moment of eternity.

To this eternity of sufferings, brethren, add an eternity of regret. To be miserable by necessity is a situation to be pitied: but to be miserable through our own fault, and only because we will be so, is a folly without example, except in the case of hell. Yet such is the condition of the reprobate. I might, he constantly repeats, have not been damned, and it is my own doing that I am. Would heaven have cost me more, than so many others, of whose happiness I have had a glimpse? Ah! had I made these reflections, when I was in a condition to profit by them! Alas! I made them; I even foresaw what I should one day suffer, for not weighing them with attention. But having neglected to take advantage of them: I have nothing left but to regret it, and my regret must be eternal.

O God

O God! what a cruel torment! a torment, that will make those wretches feel all the consequences of their loss, all the calamities they have drawn upon themselves, in short whatever they endure from their obstinacy in sin.

Now tell me, Christians, do you believe the awful truths I have been setting before your eyes? Are you thoroughly convinced there is a hell to torment those sinners, of whom St. Paul says that they shall have no place in heaven? I mean the drunkard, the detractor, the libertine, &c. Do you believe any thing yet further of this hell, which I have painted in such terrifying, though most defective colours? Do you believe, I say, that this hell is destined by the Supreme Being to punish a momentary crime, an instantaneous, but deliberate thought? Are you persuaded of it? Or do you not consider what the Ministers of Christ tell you of this place of torments as the effect of exaggeration? Once more, do you believe these dreadful truths, and not shudder with horror for your perilous situation? For what, my friends, would become of the greatest part of you, were you judged this very moment? What is become of all those, who have died before you in dispositions similar to your own at present? How many of your acquaintance, your friends, your relations are now burning in hell, precisely for having lived as you live? Let us go in spirit then into these subterraneous caverns: let us descend thither during life, says St. Bernard, that we may not be compelled to do it after death: let us lend an ear for a while to the complaint of these unhappy souls. Harken: what a dismal sound issues from the infernal pit? Redouble your attention, brethren.

Methinks I hear the voice of one of your accomplices in wickedness, addressing these words to you. Oh you, who are yet inhabitants of the earth! you, who are assembled within these walls to be made acquainted with my woes! *attend, and see if there be sorrow like to mine.* Lament. i. 12. Listen; and from the frightful account I am about to give, judge, if you are able, of the excess of my misery. The God of vengeance has struck me; he has bruised me; he has crushed me, as the vintager does his grapes, *in the day of his fierce anger.* ib. He has enclosed me on every side with fire and flame; it pierces through my flesh, it reaches my soul: *from above he hath sent fire into my bones.* Ib. 13. I suffer without hopes or consolation; I neither have, nor ever shall have, the least comfort under my pains; I am filled with rage, I am oppressed with despair: *he hath made me desolate, spent with sorrow all the day.* Ib. This God, so dreadful in his wrath, has put me into the power of a merciless enemy, who never will relent; of a powerful enemy, from whom I can never escape: *he hath delivered me into a hand, from which I am not able to rise.* Ah! ye sinners that hear me! learn wisdom at my expense; between you and the fire, in which I am burning, there is but a slender partition: nevertheless, you are at your ease, you
laugh,

lough, you divert yourselves, you live as unconcernedly, as if hell was a mere fiction.

Let us avail ourselves of this advice, while yet we have time, my brethren. Oh ! that I could impress upon you indelibly this thought of eternity; a thought so salutary at present, but so much to be dreaded hereafter. That I could make the whole earth ring with that tremendous word, eternity, eternity. Ye sinners ! men, who act as if you had no judgment, *be wise at last*. Pf. xciii. 8. and take counsel from the misfortune of others. Think of hell frequently, my dear friends; this thought will arm you against sin, will preserve you from falling into this abyss of woe, and will insensibly conduct you to those mansions of felicity, to which I entreat the infinite goodness of our God to lead you. Amen.

T H E

EIGHTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the particular Judgment of the Hour of Death.

Give an Account of thy Stewardship, for now thou canst be Steward no longer. Luke xvi. 2.

THE parable of the rich man and his steward, with which the gospel of this Sunday presents us, is so obviously applicable to the particular judgment of the soul at the time of its separation from the body, that the Son of God seems to have made it purposely to impress us with an idea of the rigorous trial, we must then be summoned to.

The rich man is no other than God himself, the sovereign Lord and owner of all things. The steward is man, who holds of God not only every thing that he possesses in the line of grace, but whatever also he can possibly have any pretensions to in the order of nature: a steward, oftentimes faithless and ungrateful, who too frequently misapplies and wastes the goods intrusted to him: a steward, who at a certain hour, prefixed from all eternity, shall be cited to the tribunal of the divine justice to answer for his administration. This hour is the hour of our dissolution, that period, in which the anxious soul, freed from its prison of the flesh, shall wing its flight into the regions of immortality; an hour most tremendous to the sinner; who, without delay, must be ushered into the presence of his injured Lord, and become responsible for his conduct.

I have already, brethren, had occasion to speak to you of the general judgment, or those solemn assizes, which, at the close of nature, shall bring together all the children of Adam, to receive ~~their definitive sentence in the face of the universe~~. The judgment, I mean to treat of here, is called the particular judgment, to distinguish it from the one just mentioned. It is that examination, which each of us must undergo at the instant of our departure; and of which, according to the opinion of divines, we are to understand those words of St. Paul to the Hebrews, *It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment*. Heb. 9. The subject therefore, is highly important, Christians. For which reason, let me entreat you to give it the attention it merits, so as to make it available to your welfare: and for this purpose we will begin it by imploring the aid of God's unerring Spirit.

Give an account of thy stewardship. The time, in which these awful words shall be addressed to each of us, dear people, is the moment of our death, when we can be stewards no longer. There have indeed been instances, in which the Deity, by a singular exertion of his justice, has thought proper to pass a more early and visible sentence on some notorious sinners, by way of example; but, in general, it is usual with him to judge us only in an invisible manner, at the separation of the soul and body; and at that instant is the prosecution opened, the accusations heard, and the sentence passed and executed. Oh tremendous moment! Can I possibly lose sight of thee, which art to be the commencement of my everlasting happiness or misery? Oh fatal moment, upon whose breath hangs an eternity! How can I forget thee, without hazarding my ruin? Or how can I recollect thee, without trembling with anxiety? Let us think of it seriously, my friends, and employ every other moment with so much industry as not to lose one of them; since that single one may mean for us a felicity without end.

The time then of dissolution being come, the soul is instantly arraigned at this dreadful bar. What a matter of astonishment, to find itself on a sudden separated from all things visible, from the world, from company, from friends, from its very body even, its inseparable companion for so long a time! The only things it now beholds, of which it has any knowledge, are its works, the just objects of its terror. What alarms from its criminal conscience, which already accuses and condemns it! especially when it reflects that there is no way left to deprecate its irritated judge, that it has let slip the time of appeasing him by repentance; and that every chance of rendering him propitious is now vanished. What anxiety, when it thinks of the importance of the matter to be decided! viz. its eternal happiness or misery, of which it has every reason to apprehend the issue. It is now in vain, poor soul! to petition for delay: it is unavailable to regret the little precaution, thou hast used in this affair beforehand.

What shall I do, says Job, when God shall arise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him? Job. xxxi. 14. Will he not tell us, brethren, that he had supplied us, throughout life, with all necessary graces? Or shall we seek excuses in the maxims and customs of the world? Has he not a thousand times informed us, by his oracles, that he has long since condemned them, and that such, as follow them, are already judged? What shall I do then? What will be my fate? This is what you ought to reflect upon in time; you, who live at your ease, wrapt up in the enjoyments of a transitory life. It will then be too late; all that shall remain, at that critical moment, will be to give an immediate account of your stewardship. But, oh! Christians, what an account is it, that shall be here demanded of us? An exact and most strict account, in which nothing can elude either the knowledge or the vengeance of our Judge; a severe and irrevocable account; of which the decision shall be definitive, the consequences eternal.

The bright light of this awful Legislator's countenance will discover to us, in an instant, all our iniquities. There, my brethren, we shall see at once all our sins of whatever kind; of thought, word, and deed; the neglect of our spiritual duties, the abuse of the sacraments, the profanation of days devoted to the Lord; there we shall behold the good, we might have done, but which unhappily we omitted; the precious time we squandered away: the sacred inspirations we contemned; such insincerity in our best actions, so much extravagance on pleasure and folly, whilst our hands were unmercifully shut against the poor.

Then, my friends, and not till then, shall we see things in their true colours: and alas! how altered shall our opinion of them be? What we had thought but a trifling censure of our neighbour, shall then appear a cruel injustice. What we had esteemed but mirth, and the sallies of good-humour, shall be treated as licentiousness, and irreligion. What our delicacy or interest had prevailed upon us to omit, shall be deemed a most criminal neglect. In a word, what we had flattered ourselves would be indifferent in the eyes of our Judge, we shall then find to be the just matter of his indignation.

But was I even authorized to think myself clear of all reproach; that my hands were pure, and my conscience white as the drifted snow; still, my God! I should not cease to have reason to tremble at the thought of this alarming hour. For thy eyes are very different from mine. Thou discernest faults, where I see merit. Thou findest darkness and obscurity, where I fancy all to be luminous and brilliant. My garments, i. e. my external actions, howsoever beautiful they may appear to me, are nevertheless my shame in thy presence, and so many objects of abhorrence.

With the rays of his infinite wisdom, to use the figurative expression of St. Paul, God will dissect all the powers of the soul, and expose to open day-light its most perplex windings, its most hidden

recesses. Here, he will hold up the artifices of that double, dissembling, flattering spirit; its disguise, its malice, its perfidy. There opening its corrupt heart, what abominations shall he unveil? What impure ideas, what criminal intrigues, what envy, what vanity, what attachment to the world. Nothing so secret, that shall not then be manifested; *for all things are naked, and open to his eyes.* Heb. iv. 13. Behold, will God say, that bitter and rooted hatred, the cause of so much scandal; this profane love, which so long preyed on that carnal man; those sensual desires; that more than brutal intemperance, which for such a space of time tyrannized over him; that tongue, envenomed with gall and rancour, and distended with the poison of lasciviousness and obscenity.

Figure to yourselves at present, Christians, the distress of your then condition. What excuses will you resort to? But let me tell you, there will be no excuses for you; all things must there appear unmasked, and in their genuine colours. What will your reflections be, when you shall see yourselves surrounded with the light of God, which will place your whole life in open view? Behold there all your thoughts, all your words, all your actions. The fading glory, the perishable pleasures of the world are passed in your regard; but the sins, the numerous sins, they have occasioned you to fall into, are here still with you.

Human justice takes cognizance of such crimes only, as disturb society, and break in upon its rules; every thing else remains unnoticed. But at the tribunal of the Deity, my brethren, we must give an account of each single word; a word perhaps, whose sole malice consists in what the gospel terms idle: how much more of loose discourse, of swearing, of defamation &c.? The present is the time of mercy; the future that of justice. Now, as in this life, in which lenity presides, there is no sin so enormous, as to exclude God's forgiveness; so, after death, when justice shall resume its rights, there will be no offence so trifling, as not to attract a proportionate resentment from him.

When the sentence of this Sovereign Judge shall have branded such among our sins, as shall be capital and mortal, will this, think you, be sufficient, brethren? I should be happy, Christians, could I, by repeatedly inculcating it, impress this truth so forcibly, upon you, that nothing might efface it. No transgression, however unimportant in our ideas, will then be overlooked. As many neglects of duty, as you shall be found guilty of; neglects, I say, so frequent and so disregarded; so many subjects of condemnation. The malice of man is inexhaustible; nor is the source of the divine justice less unfathomable.

The human conscience may be compared to a shut up book, in which the syllables and letters, that form the contents of it, are blended and intermixed. But when the Almighty hand shall unfold this

this confused volume, we shall there read distinctly the whole history of our lives; of which every passage shall appear marked in such strong and lively colours, that it will not be possible to mistake them.

We are prevented at present from knowing ourselves, and listening to the voice of reason, by the tumult of our passions, and by such external objects, as our senses throw before us; by lying impostures I mean, by delusive flatteries and, above all, by the tainted air of a dissipated and corrupted world. But at this great trial, all such hindrances shall be done away. The enchanting figure of the world shall be passed; and death shall have absorbed our passions, and cut us off from the herd of sycophants, that beset us. Deserted by every creature, we shall be left entirely to ourselves. When, behold! instead of those pleasing and interested deceptions, that so long imposed upon us, we shall be taught such unwelcome truths, as we were studiously industrious to shut our eyes to; and, in lieu of the imaginary perfections, which our fancy bestowed upon us so liberally, we shall find real and most gross defects.

Give an account, will the Lord moreover say, of the many acts of wickedness you have occasioned; of the many souls, you have murdered by your bad example; of the many sins, you have committed in others, by your pernicious maxims, by your inconsiderateness, by your levity; of those children, those servants, who have been ruined by your inattention to instruct them. Must you needs act the part of the Devil, and destroy those souls, I shed my blood to save?

We are here, dear friends, in the habit of making light of sins of omission; as if the Son of God had not assured us that *the tree, that beareth not fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire*; or as if we might live in our state of life, whatsoever it be, unconcerned in respect to its obligations. We think riches well acquired, if obtained without a manifest injustice; pleasures lawful, if not carried to excess; in a word, to do no harm seems the summit of perfection; to steer clear of immorality the height of godliness.

But oh! dear people, how different will our ideas be at this impartial and decisive period? When we shall find ourselves responsible no less for the omission of virtue, than for the perpetration of vice.

However, I have done many good works, will some one say: In these I will intrench myself; on these I will boldly rest the hopes of my salvation. But be not too confident, presumptuous Christian! whosoever thou art. For let us examine, will God say, these pretended virtues; let us separate and distinguish whatever there is in them laudable, from what is not so. What were their principles and motives? Was it not caprice, constraint, or vanity? Was it not to draw the eyes of men upon you? to effect your purposes in a more refined and artful manner? Is it being virtuous to be good from humour, zealous from passion, temperate from avarice, humble from

from imbecility, or an enemy to the world from disgust? Is it religion to observe the commands of God, with a view to please men? to seek for virtue, in order to find a fortune? When these, Christians, and every like motive shall be lopped off, what will there be left of that spreading tree of virtue, under which you hope to shelter yourselves?

But supposing our intentions in all respects admissible and upright, still we shall have but too much cause to apprehend that our repentance may have been sterile, our penitential endeavours unsatisfactory, our compliance with the relative duties of our station incomplete. What assurance have we that the Sovereign Judge, after weighing all things in the balance of the sanctuary, will not say to us, as to the Bishop of Sardis in the Apocalypse, *I find not thy works full* Apoc. 3. Let this, my brethren, caution us to dread lest our best works be found unworthy to appear in the sight of God: and lest that fatal sentence, *thou art found too light*, Dan. v. which involved the ruin of Balshazer, should likewise blast the hopes of our presuming confidence.

In fine, my friends, to sum up all in short, where is the man, who, reflecting on the transactions of his life, can affirm that he has past so much as a day without infringing the laws of his Creator? Let us but throw into one pile the sins that strike our eyes, and the sins that escape our sight; the sins that give scandal to the world, and the sins the world applauds and honours with the name of virtue; the sins of youth, which, hurried on by passion, hears neither reason, duty, nor religion; and the sins of a more advanced age, which makes no other use of reason, than to offend with greater obstinacy; the sins of malice, and the sins of ignorance; the sins of abuse and the sins of neglect; the sins against the general duties of Christianity, and the sins against the particular obligations of our state; the sins we are forced to condemn, in spite of ourselves, and the sins we would willingly gloss over, because we are not disposed to correct them. To our own offences let us add the crimes we have occasioned in our neighbour: ever keeping in view the following maxims; first, that, although sin appears not outwardly, it is nevertheless consummated in a moment in the corruption of the heart; secondly, that the omission of our respective duties is no less criminal, than the positive transgression of God's law; and lastly, that complaisance, custom, and human respects are but vain excuses, to which not the smallest attention will be paid at the divine tribunal. All these things, I say, maturely weighed, can we be surprised that the Royal Prophet should entreat the Lord not to *enter into judgment with his servant*; or that he adds that, *in his sight, no one living shall be justified*? Ps. cxlii. 2.

To us then, Christians, are those words most applicable, which Pilate addressed to our Saviour, when at his bar; *Behold in how many*

many things they accuse thee: Mark xv. 4. for, at that time, Christ was the representative of us, and held the place of sinners.

Behold then, I say, that the judgment, I have been speaking of, is not so distant as you may have imagined. Perhaps, you supposed it might have been deferred till the consummation of the world; but you see that it may possibly arrive before the conclusion of this year, of this month or of this week even.

Behold therefore again, my friends, and view your folly. For who will dare to offend, that does but seriously reflect, that in a short space of time, perhaps the very moment after his sin he may be arraigned at the tribunal of a judge, infinitely wise, whose nothing can escape; infinitely just, whose decision must be equitable; infinitely powerful, to whom all resistance would be nugatory; or a judge in fine, the Sovereign Legislator of mankind; who, as he has given them the code of his sacred laws, will try them by the same unerring rules; and, according to their deserts, pass sentence on each of misery or happiness everlasting.

Oh deplorable condition of the sinner! who, charged with so many crimes, and conscious of such foul ingratitude; between two eternities, between heaven and hell; uncertain, anxious, trembling awaits his doom.

Behold in how many things they accuse thee; what wilt thou say, unhappy wretch! when thou shalt be compelled to open thy eyes, which hitherto thou hast kept shut; and when, in spite of thyself, thou shalt read the sentence of thy condemnation, indicted by the hand of the Deity; a sentence, that will harrow up thy soul, more cruelly than the fire of hell itself.

That none of you, my dear people, may be reduced to this dreadful state, ever have this awful judgment before your eyes: think of it often, and above all, think of it, I beseech you, attentively. Nothing, but the want of thought, has brought the person, I am here describing, into such extremities of misery; and be assured that the like want of serious consideration will plunge you also into similar distress. To prevent it therefore, accompany the sinner frequently to his trial, and take a view of its fatal issue. See the shock of this miserable soul, on finding itself destined by its severe, but just judge, to the abodes of endless woe: mark its dread, at the opening of those tremendous gates, which ever after shall be closed upon it; and take your lesson from its unutterable horror, at the sight of those devouring and inextinguishable flames, into which it is about to step.

Were we truly penetrated with the fear of God's judgments, Christians, and thoroughly sensible of that rigorous account, which we shall soon be called upon to render of our stewardship, there is nothing we should not do, nothing we should not submit to, that might in any way contribute to ease us of the oppressive burthen of our sins. We are all of us, alas! indebted to the divine justice, ten thousand talents, i. e. an immense debt, which we have contracted

tracted by our offences: nor have we any remedy, but to implore the patience, and, if possible, avert the anger of our offended Lord, by works of penance. These, I confess, are pleasing to nature. But since, my brethren, we have no other resource left, can we be unwilling to resort to these, which are the only means left to prepare for the solemn trial, that is ere long to decide our destiny? Nor let any one despair, of finding mercy, while in life, howsoever numerous his crimes may be; since he will have for his judge the same God, as was pleased to come into the world for no other purpose than to *save sinners*, and whose ardent wish is still to bring the lost sheep back to his fold. Be but truly penitent, my dear friends; have but recourse to him, in the manner he himself prescribes; make an impartial examination of your souls beforehand; confess at the tribunal of penance every thing, you may be apprehensive of being reproached with at his bar; cast yourself at the feet of his ministers; speak to them without disguise, and shew your sincerity by the amendment of your lives; and all will still be well with you. Your conversion will then become a subject of joy to the celestial court; and a source of unspeakable and never ending happiness to yourselves, which I devoutly entreat may be the portion of you all. Amen.



THE

T H E

NINTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Remorse of Conscience.

If thou hadst known the things that are to thy peace.

Luke xix. 42.

TH E subversion of Jerusalem, which our Saviour here foretells, and which was accomplished soon after, may abundantly evince how fatal a thing it is to be insensible to the calls of heaven. Had the Jews but been industrious to come at the knowledge of him, who stood in the midst of them, they might have prevented their destruction. Nor have we, Christians, any other means to ward off the impending blow, than by endeavouring to acquire a true knowledge of our interior. But how shall we obtain it? By attending to our conscience, brethren. This will tell us that, of ourselves, we are nothing but weakness and sin: that if we are in possession of any good, it is derived from our Creator, and is the gift of his free bounty; that it is true he has favoured us with many graces, which are daily increasing; but that our sins at least keep peace with them; and that these are the two things the most remarkable in our lives; first, that our sinfulness has not prevented God from loving us tenderly, nor from heaping his blessings on us; and secondly, that such repeated benefactions have not diminished our ingratitude: that still we daily resist the inspirations of his grace, and are deaf to the cries of conscience, which reproaches us with our misconduct. This latter point I here intend to elucidate
for

for your instruction; proving to you first, that God never acts more favourably by you than when he urges you by the remorse of conscience, and secondly, that you never injure him more sensibly than when you turn a deaf ear to its reproaches. These two reflections will, I hope, suffice to discover the mercy of your God on the one hand, and your own ingratitude on the other. But this he alone can effect, whose aid duty calls upon us to solicit in the first place.

To convince you, my friends, that God never gives you a stronger proof of his love than when in midst of your iniquities, he checks you by the remorse of conscience, it suffices to lay it down as a principle that these internal reproaches, which you endeavour to smother, are in fact so many graces; and on this head let us make a few reflections.

And first, dear people, remark, that the importunities of conscience which you experience when so unhappy as to offend God, are graces that he bestows on you in order to reclaim you. This has always been his conduct in regard to such sinners as he was desirous to bring back to virtue. He shews that rodd with thorns, he unbitters all their pleasures, he reproaches them with their crimes incessantly by the ministry of conscience. Whenever therefore, after the commission of any sin, you feel yourselves uneasy, it is God himself that makes you so. When thou wert solicitous, he says, to hide thy iniquity from thyself, *thou thoughtest that I should be like to thee*; Ps. xlix. 20. But thou wert mistaken; *I will reprove thee, and set thy abominations before thy face*. Ib. But why does the omnipotent Being thus pursue you? Because he loves you, Christians. *Such as I love*, he says, *I rebuke and chastise*. Apoc. iii. 19. Must we not acknowledge then, that the reproaches of conscience, which succeed to sin, are graces that dispose us to conversion? Internal not external graces; since they are formed within us, in the recesses of our souls: whence St. Paul says, that *God hath sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, to cry out against our wickedness*. Gal. iv. 6.

But here, my brethren, I go a step further, and assert, that this interior remorse which galls you, is the first grace God affords you, with a view of your conversion. When you offend him by a mortal sin, at that instant your soul is stript of all its merit, deprived of its claim to glory, and of all pretensions to the assistance of heaven. As therefore, in this condition, you cannot make the least advance towards returning to him, what does God do? He anticipates you: but how? By making your conscience speak to reproach you with your sin, and stimulate you to repentance. Behold a striking example, that will help you to comprehend this matter. David falls, and to conceal his crime, gives orders that the husband of the woman he had sinned with, be exposed to imminent death. David, an adulterer, and an homicide, is perfectly at ease; nor does the Scripture insinuate that he shews any disposition to repent. The Lord, who

who looks upon him with the eye of mercy, begins by making him sensible of the stings of conscience. At the voice of the prophet Nathan, David exclaims, *I have sinned*, 2 Kings xii. 13. Such is the power of conscience which first convinced this criminal prince of his misconduct.

Nor imagine, Christians, that the Almighty Sovereign when you have offended, degrades his Majesty by thus stooping, as I may say, to court you. No; in doing this he still supports his dignity. He recalls the sinner; but without impairing his authority. He makes the first advances; but he makes them as a King, as a Monarch, as a God. How so? By the very anxiety with which he fills him. For conscience, as the holy Job says, does not only dignify the sinner in relation to the past and present: it not only reminds him of his lewdness, his injustice, &c. but it moreover sets before him a dreadful futurity, and makes him feel beforehand all the torments due to the long catalogue of his iniquities. He fancies he sees, on every side, flames that threaten him, and tortures that await him. Represent to yourselves a condemned criminal; he already undergoes his sentence, and for a single real death, endures a thousand imaginary ones that are no less dreadful. A striking resemblance this of a sinner, arraigned by his own conscience. Sometimes he thinks himself at the bar of the Divinity, expecting the sentence of an inexorable judge; at other times precipitated into the bottomless pit. He is alive indeed, but his life is scarcely more desirable than that of the reprobate in hell. Does not God then manifest the sovereignty of his power by the punishments he inflicts, notwithstanding that he seeks to reclaim us?

Another great advantage of this remorse of conscience is, that it is a fixed and permanent grace; a grace that God favours us with in spite of ourselves, and which we cannot throw off. Have you not frequently experienced the truth of this assertion, Christians? What, I ask, has been the result of your endeavours to stifle the thought of any crime when it obtruded on your rest? Useless efforts. For you must allow that sin bears down upon the conscience with such a force, that with all its exertions it cannot prevent being overpowered by it. We would willingly conceal it from our own heart. We should be glad, if possible, to hinder ourselves from thinking we had done wrong, because this reflection disturbs our peace and shocks self-love: but in vain. The offence is ever uppermost, and we feel the condemnation, which in defiance of us, conscience pronounces on our guilt. Such is the particular effect of his grace, that the more worthy of it a man becomes, the closer it adheres to him. It enters in with sin, and scarcely ever quits the conscience that delays to renounce its habits.

Again, my friends; as this grace of remorse of conscience is the most lasting in its duration, so it is the most useful in its extent. It is a grace common to all. Not only the virtuous feel its stings, as David after a sin of frailty and surprise; but such traitors as Judas,

such

such déicides as the Jews, such fratricides as Cain; all without exception are open to its attacks. *Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil.* Rom. ii. 9. What a consolation for you, my brethren, for those among you in particular, who perhaps for years have been bent double by the weight of your sins; who have formed to yourselves what the Apostle styles a *fearful conscience*; 1 Tim. iv. 2. and who, to impose upon your pastor, have come to the Confessional, with the same habits, the same determination to persevere in your crimes, and have insolently presented yourselves at the sacred table in these sentiments? What a consolation, I repeat; that you can say to yourselves: sinner as I am; a criminal, obdurate, sacrilegious sinner, I may yet hope; God has still a grace in store for me, as well as for the just?

Moreover, admire, Christians, that these alarms of conscience are sure graces, and which cannot mislead you. Because the devil, that *roaring lion*, *robs about seeking whom he may devour*, 1 Pet. v. 8, cannot disguise, and transform himself, as the Scripture says, into an angel of light to deceive you. For it is certain, that this spirit of darkness will never think of representing to a sinner the shame and scandal of his proceedings. On the contrary, he does his utmost to hide from him the foulness of his iniquities, to diminish their enormity, to efface their remembrance from his mind, and to prevent him from laying them at the feet of his Confessor. Be then assured, brethren, that whenever, after having offended God mortally, you feel this secret anguish, it is he himself who speaks to you, and that this salutary concern proceeds solely from his grace.

In fine, to conclude this first part, let us know that of all the heavenly graces, there is perhaps none that disposes the mind of man to repentance more effectually. For what can operate to this purpose with greater efficacy, than to be obliged to be our own accusers, as soon as we have sinned, and to be compelled to pronounce the sentence of condemnation on ourselves. I have fallen into the crime of impurity; I have injured my neighbour; I have received the sacraments without the requisite dispositions. I cannot deny but I am a sinner; my conscience tells me so; and it tells me still more; that I have a thousand times deserved hell; that without the mercy of God, which expects me to-day, but which perhaps may not do so to-morrow, I should be the unhappy victim of the devil. All this, dear Christians, is included in the reproaches, which this insuperable grace conveys. In courts of human judicature, the conviction of a criminal may be dubious; because the witnesses may be bribed off, or their evidence prove contradictory. Not so however in a troubled conscience. This is a witness not to be equalled; and which is so much the more formidable, as it cannot be rejected since it is always present; it cannot be called in question since it is always sure; it cannot be won over since it is always inexorable; it cannot be intimidated since it is always free; it cannot be set aside since it is always inseparable from the criminal; finally, it cannot be

be silenced : it speaks, it cries out without ceasing, not to the ears, but to the heart.

Let us then enter into the sentiments of those repenting sinners, mentioned by Jeremy ; who, being converted from their evil ways, attributed the happy change to the remorse that haunted them, while they walked in the road of perdition. O God ! said they, thou hast deceived us to our interest. When we revolted against thy law, and followed the bent of our inclinations, *we looked for peace, and no good came.* We sought a remedy to our misfortunes, and thou hast sent us trouble ; *a time of healing, and behold fear.* Jer. viii. 15. Wherefore, O Lord ! *we acknowledge our wickedness, for we have sinned against thee.* Ib. xiv. 20. You have now beheld the advantages that arise from the remorse of conscience, Christians ; let us next see how great must be your ingratitude if you be deaf to its reproaches.

Since therefore this remorse is a grace, are you not highly culpable if you refuse to listen to it ? Yes ; to shut your ears against it, is to resist the Holy Ghost, as I will shew you by the recapitulation of what I have said already.

First, convinced as you ought by this time to be, that the anxiety which agitates your minds when you offend God, is a singular grace ; should you not also be satisfied, that to bar the avenues of your heart against it, is resisting heaven, is rebellious to the voice of the Holy Ghost, which speaks by that of your conscience ? And may I not justly address those words to you which St. Stephen did to the Jews ? *Insensible men, uncircumcised hearts, you always resist the Holy Ghost.* Acts vii. 51. But in what respect were the Jews to blame ? In being deaf to that remorse of conscience which reproached them, with not having known the promised Messiah when he stood in the midst of them ; with having opposed him and his doctrine ; with having persisted in their decide rather than confess, as St. Paul says, that they had crucified the author of life. Now, is not this, my brethren, exactly what you do when influenced by passion, you give into those excesses that reflect disgrace upon us all ? In vain does conscience tell you, such a thing is a sin, this injustice, that habit of swearing, that scandalous connection, &c. Insensible to its admonitions, passion stifles the voice of conscience. Nothing checks you, and as headstrong as the Jews, you boldly resist the interior Monitor which importunes you so incessantly.

But know ; although the hearing of it should make you tremble ; know, I say, that by rejecting this first means of conversion, you in some sense reject all the treasures of God's mercy. Conscience once lulled, the heart becomes callous ; and you live on undisturbed, because you hear but indistinctly this secret witness, that accuses you, this severe judge, that condemns you. After this, my friends, what further can you expect the Deity should attempt in order to reclaim you ? Do you suppose, that he will favour you with any other

other grace? But can he do it, consistently with the regulations of his providence? For I have told you, in my part, that the remorse of conscience is a grace altogether miraculous; inasmuch as it springs from sin itself. But will you not allow that the more miraculous it is in its origin, the more culpable you become by resisting it? God displays the wonders of his mercy by giving you an antidote against your crime, in the crime itself. But you, by an inconceivable perverseness, renders this grace abortive, and defeat his intentions; as if the malignity of your heart meant to insult his excessive bounty.

Nor is this all, brethren; the malice of the sinner, who is obstinately deaf to the voice of conscience, which presses him to return to God, includes an attempt to revolt against his Supreme Majesty. For the more the Sovereign Being acts in character, the more guilty we become, if we refuse obedience to his orders. Now, by the stings of conscience, with which God visits us, he acts as our superior; since he thereby humbles, he troubles, he terrifies us; he sets before our eyes our sins with all their deformity, our crimes with all their horror, our profanations with all their consequences. Are we not then audacious rebels, Christians, when we suppress the cries of conscience, that so frequently, so feelingly, so cruelly harrow us up? Since we refuse to lend an ear to the remonstrances of our ruler; since we take it ill, that he should reprove us; since we make no account of his threatening to punish us by an eternity of sufferings, by devouring flames, by weeping and gnashing of teeth for endless ages.

Besides, if it be certain, as I have already told you, that there is no grace more constant or more durable than this of remorse, does not your daily opposing it evince how culpable you become, by so doing? Is it not even to declare open war on God? Is it not the same, as if you said to him; Lord! thou art resolved to attack me in all quarters, and I am equally determined to resist thee: if I cannot silence thee, at least I shall succeed in expelling thee from my heart, which thou art so desirous to take possession of? I will do you justice, dear people, and declare I verily believe there is not one among you, that would utter such horrid blasphemies. But is it not in some measure making use of this impious language, to persist in your sins determinately, in defiance of the importunities of conscience?

And this, Christians, will appear the more credible, if you call to mind I told you that the grace of remorse was, of all others, the most extensive. Whence it evidently follows that, to be rebellious to it, is wilfully to renounce the grace, our Creator makes the greatest use of, and which he does not withhold even from the most abandoned. And what will you have left then? Do you not, by such a conduct, make a hell here below? For one of the greatest torments of the damned is, not so much to feel the gnawings of the worm of conscience, that *never dies*, as to find it out of their power

power to avail themselves of its reproaches. Your situation, friends, is not entirely similar; because God gives you these admonitions purposely to recall you to him; and while you have life, you may turn them to a good account, by your conversion. But in fact, what matters it you may make use of them, if you do not? What signifies their being the most universal and extensive of all graces, if you are determined not to profit by them?

In fine, dear Christians; not to abuse your attention, although the subject concerns you so nearly; I conclude by repeating that the grace of remorse of conscience being the most sure grace, a grace, the least liable to deception, and which most effectually disposes you to repentance, to turn a deaf ear to it, is to want confidence, and open a door, in some measure, to despair. For be assured, on the part of God, when your conscience reproaches you with your irregularities, whatsoever they may be, that the Lord does not forget you, but still looks towards you with an eye of pity. And this for you, habitual, inveterate sinners! is almost the only plank, you have left, to avoid shipwreck. But, in the idea of St. Bernard, if this remorse is the most certain of all graces, to resist it is the most immediate disposition to despondency. Because, in this unhappy state, your conscience, which at present is so clamorous, bringing to light, on the day of trial, all that it had hitherto concealed, will raise up against you such accusers and witnesses, as it will be impossible for you to withstand. *Their consciences*, says St. Paul, *bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing one another*. Rom. ii. 15. Accusations and evidence, that must overwhelm us with confusion; since we ourselves shall be obliged to own that we have sinned, that we are inexcusable in what we have done, and that the justice of the Deity, which we have so outrageously insulted, by the multitude of our iniquities, is unblamable in our regard, and clear of censure.

From what I have said, let us infer, dear people, that as long as there remains in the soul of the sinner any symptom of remorse, it is a sign that his conscience is not as yet hardened. But when, amidst the guilt of sin, we live in peace, fearless of death and a woful damnation; then, I say, we have every thing to dread. Because we cannot flatter ourselves, after the commission of so many crimes, with the hopes of that peace, which according to the expression of Jeremy, is no more: *they healed the breach of my people disgracefully; saying, peace, peace, and there was no peace*. Jer. vi. 14.

Let our first endeavours then be, dear friends, to sound our heart. Hence, says the wise-man, *issueth life*. Prov. iv. 23. Hence also cometh death: since our Saviour tells us that from this source proceeds adulteries, murders and whatever tends to defile a man. Let us examine, let us know, let us judge ourselves. God sees us, he knows us, and he will judge us by our heart.

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Let us listen at present to what this conscience dictates, and not be so insensible to our true interests, as to shut our ears to its remonstrances. Unhappy we, should we prove neglectful of its warnings. Having reproached us in time, it will upbraid us throughout eternity. Let such be our attention to it, that we may hope to arrive, by its assistance, at the term of that happy immortality, to which I entreat the Lord in his infinite goodness to conduct us. Amen.

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fection of a spiritual life. To which I add, that it is the property of false devotion to clothe itself in the outward garb of the law, whilst it totally neglects the inward, and only mentions qualifications for the former. Thus, it will fast, it will pray, it will give alms; it will generally be remarkable even for its zealous performance of these and the like external duties; although, at the same time it is the slave of self-love, it is distended with conceit and pride, it looks on its neighbour with disdain; and wraps itself up in the swelling bubble of its supposed perfections. This is what I term *false devotion*; as being but the outside, the shell, the bark of virtue, and destitute of the qualities that characterize sincere and solid piety. That you may learn to know a rock that has been satiated with water, by seeing what you have to do to be truly virtuous; I purpose to explain to you in this discourse what solid devotion is; which consists, first, I say, in rendering to God such an homage as is worthy of him; and secondly, in executing with fidelity the work that he has assigned us. These two points I will endeavour to make intelligible and clear; after a petition to implore that grace, *without which we can do nothing*.

OF TRUE DEVOTION

Three things, dear Christians, must concur to make the homage we pay to God deserving of his high regard. Our intention must be pure; for God will be served for his own sake solely. Our homage must be orderly, and conformable to his sacred will; and finally, it must be constant, and not apt to change and fluctuate. These three conditions, diligently observed, cannot fail to render our services acceptable to the Supreme Being.

The first requisite then, I say, to make your homage worthy of the sovereignty of God, is purity of intention: in which respect St. Augustine makes no distinction between devotion and the worship of God; nor between the worship of God and his divine law. For what is it, he says, to be devout and to serve the Lord, unless it, be to love him? In a word, by the same commandment, God exacts both our service and our love: because it is impossible to love him without serving him. Do you desire to know, he continues, to what length you are bound to carry this purity of intention, without which your devotion can never be acceptable? You must carry it so far, as to exclude every other intention, consecrating yourselves to God only, but God himself. A hard thing this you will say; but have patience, and I will clear away your difficulties.

From what I have said, infer my friends, that the Deity regards neither such as serve him with an eye to human applause and the advancement of their own glory; nor those mercenary hirelings, whose piety is interested. In regard to the former, it is certain that they are objects of God's horror: since, like the Pharisees, whom our divine Saviour so pointedly condemns, they observe no regularity of conduct, nor practise any good, but to acquire the esteem of men. And as to the latter, whose devotion is solely influenced by

of temporary emoluments, depend upon it, his judgment of it is no regard more favourable.

Now, dear people, I must explain myself, for fear you should think I mean to render virtue inextinguishable; a thing very distant from my design. I am not ignorant that there are certain temporal goods, which, according to St. Bernard, enter into the order of nature. For, says this Father, it is morally certain, there will be, on earth, such a love of God, as to be totally pure and disinterested. The whole secret is to refuse that view, whatever it may be; and behold, Christians, how to do it. In the first place, reject every intention which is in itself unsuitable. For only to use the acquisition of worldly goods, to make the pleasure of possessing them your last and final end, without any eye to those of God, would be a criminal, a detestable view; a view, which is in itself according with piety, would be subversive of religion. In the second place, give filiation the preference to every thing. Thus, although the good order of God permits you to desire temporal goods, to petition for your daily bread; nevertheless, you must be disposed to sacrifice all such interests to the welfare of your souls, if necessity demands it; to sell yourselves entirely on the service of Jesus Christ, who prescribes to *put in the first place the kingdom of God*; and to trust that *all other things shall be added to you*. Matt. vi. 33. Lastly, ask for the things of this life, health, riches, &c. only with the desire to be enabled to serve God more perfectly, and to acquit yourselves with greater diligence of your religious obligations. Things thus regulated, says St. Bernard, our heart will coincide with that purity of intention, which is required of us as Christians.

On this ground then I leave it to your own decision, whether you can console yourselves with a well-founded assurance of walking in the ways of righteousness. To be truly devout is to adore Jesus Christ *in spirit and in truth*; to adhere to the mandates of duty, in spite of censure and its malignity; to love virtue; to seek it incessantly; and to put every spring in play to reach the summit of perfection. Does this picture resemble you, dear people? And can you flatter yourselves with the thoughts of feeling in your heart the warmth of that sacred charity, which was the glory of the primitive Church? What preachers might I not here be authorized to exhort you, was I inclined to enter upon a more minute detail? But let us proceed, and examine if our piety be such as to put us upon loving God according to the rules of his sacred ordinance.

For know, my friends, that our devotion to be grateful to the Deity, must be conformable to his heavenly will. Now the duty which he requires of you most explicitly and positively, is to comply punctually with his commands. "Do what you will, says the Almighty, but never entertain a hope of its being pleasing to me, if you fail to observe the dictates of his holy law." And you thoroughly comprehend this maxim, brethren, would you

so often be observed to shew a greater keenness in regard to temporal welfare, a greater eagerness in the pursuit of vanity, greater acrimony in your censures, a greater malevolence in your resentments, than the most notorious sinners? Ah! dear Christians, strive to be less ostentatious in your piety and more disinterested; less specious and more charitable.

For this, I say, is the only devotion that God acknowledges to adhere to his divine precepts; *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* Matt. xix. 17. And as for any further practices, let such pious exercises be adopted, according to each one's leisure, (and only such) as are approved of by the Church: whilst it be the province of all to address themselves to their Creator in the morning and in the evening; to raise their hearts to him frequently in the progress of the day, offering to him their employments, their labours, their sufferings, and their whole being; to assist, as often as possible at the adorable sacrifice of the altar, more especially on Sundays and Holidays; to fortify themselves, by frequenting the divine mysteries at proper seasons; to regulate their conduct by such articles of the divine law, as particularly regard their state of life; to do nothing inconsistent with that justice, which is due to every one. Such Piety, and such alone, is the religion God requires of us.

But alas! dear people, how shall I express the careless indifference, the greatest part of you discover in regard to your spiritual exercises? You come to them with a backwardness that betrays an unwilling heart. You undertake them as a task that custom requires of you, but which inclination does not second. It is not without reluctance you afford one single half-hour to the duties of religion; and even this you think sufficient to deserve the name of pious Christians. What tepidity at your private prayers! what manifold distractions at the public service! what indifference in approaching to the sacred table where Christ feeds you with his own body? Consider these things attentively, my friends; and let your practice decide your merit.

But to what I have here said let us add a third reflection. Our devotion to be sincere, must be durable and constant. God is always, in the same degree, worthy of our homage, and always challenges it alike; nor is there any thing more inconsistent with our piety than the want of this steadiness. As the Almighty Being never ceases to heap his blessings on us, so our hearts should never cease to pay the just tribute of their gratitude. For which reason, St. Paul exhorts us to return him thanks at all times, and for all things.

But what inference are we to draw from this, dear Christians? That to serve God occasionally, and only by fits and starts, is not the devotion he exacts. There are many, who, by adversity, or some distress of mind or body, are led to form pious projects, and to enter their names boldly among the champions of virtue. This may be commendable: for the Lord often permits the world to

shows upon us, that we may be under the happy necessity of applying to him. But, in so doing, we must be sincere: nor when the storm is over, are we to throw aside inconsiderately what we had so wisely taken up.

Otherwise, brethren, but little account is to be made, I think, of such effusions of piety as are the produce of misfortune, affliction, or the like incidental occurrences. For, as metal melts over the fire, but recovers its former hardness when again removed from it; so is the heart often pliable, and the eye wet, when heaven threatens; but resume their wonted ease when the scourge is out of sight. As the waters of the Jordan fell backwards while the ark was on its passage, and, when it was over, flowed immediately in their natural course; so neither is it unusual in some people to stop, and suspend the hand of their iniquity, during the moments of their zeal; but this being spent, and their fervour exhausted, they return to their disorders, and that frequently with redoubled eagerness. Such a capricious, temporizing piety as this is, cannot fail to be highly offensive to the Lord, who calls for our service at all times, and under every circumstance, and will be honoured uniformly and constantly. May then our fidelity, besides inducing us to render such an homage to the Deity as he requires, make us apply ourselves with diligence to the work he has marked out for us.

St. Paul teaches us in what manner to serve God and to be devout. Let each one, may I say to you, dear friends, as he said formerly to the Ephesians, be attentive to his own business. If then you would espouse the part of piety, you must consider seriously what is your state of life, what is demanded of you, and study to discharge your obligations faithfully.

Since you are desirous therefore, as I trust, dear people, to embrace the cause of virtue; you must, in the first place, consider who you are, and what are your engagements. For know that God positively requires of you an uninterrupted application to the different functions of your state, and it is in this point chiefly that true devotion consists.

But oh! Christians; what ought to be the solid foundation of true piety, is the very article we are most in the habit of neglecting. The generality of people live in a gross and stupid ignorance of their obligations in this regard. They form such plans of pious exercises, as are incompatible with their condition; and scarcely ever pay attention to those, which alone the Lord demands of them. How few are there present, brethren, that have ever reasoned in the manner following? It is necessary that I should acquire the knowledge of my engagements, and learn what God expects of me in my department. Can I be ignorant, that if I would fulfil the duties of a good Christian, I must carefully attend to the employments of my state; that whatever deviates from this rule, be its extent how great soever, is a superfluous supererogation, which

is neither acceptable to the Deity, nor of any use in a spiritual life?

To how many delusions, nevertheless, does this error give birth? Such a one has his hours of prayer, which no confusion can prevail upon him to interrupt. This is laudable, provided no inconvenience be the consequence. But if this person be obliged to earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow, I would tell him not to devote that time to prayer, which he should give to labour and the maintenance of his family; for that these duties claim his principal attention.

The heart is the seat of devotion; where, when once it has secured a footing, it is productive of the greatest blessings. The grain of wheat, when duly enclosed in the earth, will yield its fruit; whereas, if thrown upon a rock or high road, where it is exposed, it will prove sterile. In the same manner, brethren, when devotion fails to take root in the heart, it never can support itself, but quickly vanishes, like the grass upon the house top, as the Psalmist says; *which withereth before it be plucked up.* Ps. cxxviii. 6. This superficial piety will rot for want of roots, and find its death in its own shallowness; while true devotion, attached to the call of its respective state, goes on from virtue to virtue, and advances daily to perfection.

Hence, my dear friends, it is obvious, that to be truly devout is to aim at what is substantial and obligatory; and not to set ourselves on such works of piety as may tend to distinguish and make us singular. For it is certain, and I entreat you to observe it carefully, that the chief condition of virtue is that it be properly directed, and that every thing essential take place of what is only of supererogation, however shewy or attractive it may appear.

Secondly, if any one among you, brethren, wishes to be sincerely virtuous, he should reason thus. As the Almighty Sovereign, in the order of his providence, has placed me under certain obligations in regard to others, there can be no doubt but he confides in me for the performance of those duties. You, for instance, who have servants to till your grounds, to execute your commands, to do the necessary business for your families, &c. it is your part to make them attentive to their Maker, and observant of his law. God depends on you for this. You married people, whom the bond of affection should unite, no less than the tie of interest; it is your concern to promote each other's future as well as present happiness, and to strive to walk hand in hand in the path of virtue. You parents, whom the disposal of heaven has blessed with children, it is your first duty to superintend their education. The Lord intends to put the care of making him known, obeyed, and honoured by them. These, Christians, are the main and leading obligations he lays upon you: nor can you possibly be faithful servants, without an exact compliance with these, his particular injunctions.

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The third thing, my brethren, you have to do, and which is a necessary consequence of the two preceding, is to be engaged in the relative engagements I am here speaking of. It is for you to disturb the economy, established by God, for the honour of his work. Those who are subject to you, as you are to your superiors, were they to neglect your orders, or to neglect their duty, would they do any thing but what you had particularly pointed out, would they not derange the whole system of your business? The like conclusion you occasion in the house of God, when you neglect his work. In you he considers, I repeat, for the performance of that which you alone can execute.

For remark, dear people, that, as the various disorders that enter into the different branches of life, originate in the neglect of the work appointed by the Sovereign, so, for a contrary reason, the accomplishment of that work is the basis of peace, tranquillity, and genuine devotion. Until you be faithful in this regard, never flatter yourselves with the hopes of any recompense; which God will assuredly never give but in a degree proportioned to the obedience of his will.

Wherefore, brethren, there is no matter more deserving of your attention than this, on which your salvation depends. For we may all, and each individual of us say: unless I execute my task; unless I perform what God commands me, there is no salvation to be hoped for. It is certain that he rewards none but his servants; nor is it less so, that I can only deserve to be styled his servant in proportion as I obey his orders. What then shall hinder me from fulfilling my engagements to him? Nothing surely can but the want of inclination. Neither age, penury, sickness, nor the most laborious work can obstruct my being virtuous, if my will be but disposed to it.

Yes, my dear friends; what other people have done, we may do equally, as St. Augustine says. Every age supplies us with examples of old and young, of married and single, of wealthy and indigent, who have signalized themselves by their virtues, and by their adherence to the Lord. They have been known to observe his precepts, and execute his will under all circumstances. Daniel was young, Joseph a slave, Cornelius a soldier, Timothy infirm, Peter a fisherman. The difference of age, of complexion, or of situation, did not prevent them from serving their Maker, according to their condition. On the contrary, it was their fidelity in complying with the duties of their calling, that made them so renowned, and worthy of being held up as models of imitation. And nothing but a similar fidelity, be assured, Christians, and a devotion, regulated by, and proportioned to your obligations, will ever sanctify you. This is the criterion of a sincere servant of God, of a person that is truly virtuous: and by this mark we may know those whom Christ rejects in his Gospel, who honour him with their lips only: that is to say, who, while they profess to pay obedience to him, do their own will only, and scarce ever that of the Deity.

Hence,

Hence, my friends, conclude that devotion is not confined to
 to children, nor to age: that it is for the layman as for the
 monk, for the married as for the single, for the rich as for the
 poor. All have a power to be truly devout: and the command
 to many hearts of every state, who have happily received
 of this happy spirit, that the Author of wisdom has
 sent us in a full command, but it may be executed by
 a command be not wanting.

Finally, dear people, I will close this discourse by giving
 you the important instruction of St. Bernard. Do you wish to
 to give yourselves to God? If so, pay attention to your desires
 for what you love and what you fear; what rejoices and what
 grieves you. Love only God; or if you love any thing else,
 love it solely for his sake. Fear nothing but to offend God: or
 to do any thing else, fear it solely as much as it is
 to offend him. I shall tell you, it is better to offend him
 than to offend any thing of the kind as a man's will is
 more in your power, and to unite you to him more fully by
 his will: as I ardently wish he may be all.

Wretched creature, there is no matter more believing of you
 attention than this, on which my friends depend. For we may
 all, and each individual of us say: unless I can cure my self, unless
 I perform what God commands me, there is no reason to be hoped
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 and worthy of being imitated. Let us, dear friends, and a devoted
 heart, let us, as St. Bernard says, let us, Christians, and a devoted
 heart, and proposed to you, Christians, will ever be
 that we may be united to God, and by this mark we may know those who
 are united to him. God will reward him who will not be only
 that we may be united to him, and reward him who will not be only
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you will do us to follow the tracks of your heart, you will be
you are going to announce your crimes for ever. But
to the world, you intend to persuade yourself that
satisfied of this, you will do us to follow the tracks of your heart,
imagine that the good father and divides itself, and to be
the heart we are generally divided, it often happens that

They bring to him one deaf and dumb. Mark viii. 26.

SIN, my dear friends, to which the infirmities here mentioned may be said to be allusive, delivers us all from our very birth. Of ourselves, we are incapable of applying for relief; but must be presented by the hands of others: for which reason the Church assigns us God-fathers and God-mothers, who may offer us to the Lord and answer for us. Happy still, were there no other deaf and dumb but those that come into life tainted with this original infection. But alas! scarcely does the dawn of reason discover to man the use of his free will, before he misapplies and perverts it, by the commission of actual sin; which once more involves him in that distress of guilt, from which baptism had freed him. Touched with compassion for his wretched state; *pressed*, as St. Paul says, by the *charity of Christ*, if I do not here intend to lay open to the libertine the filth of his offences; to the drunkard the horror of his excesses; to each of them the infinite torments, that await their crimes; I mean at least to cry out to them with the said Apostle; *rise thou that sleepest; arise from the dead, and Christ shall enlighten thee*. Eph. v. 14. Take up a resolution to renounce your evil ways; let the determination be sincere, and the means of putting it in practice efficacious. But to set so important a matter in a clearer light, I design to shew you

first, what are the conditions that should accompany your purposes of amendment; and secondly, what the means you must employ to persevere in them; after a previous address to him, who came to instruct us in the way of salvation.

You have been taught, dear people, from your earliest infancy, that repentance is the only means to effect a reconciliation with God, after the division caused by sin, "But alas! says St. Ambrose, the remedy is frequently our poison: the matter of our victory is a subject of triumph to the devil, who is most industrious to supplant us." Now the causes of this abuse are many. But the principal one is the want of a settled resolution of avoiding sin in future; to guard you against which, I will inform you what the conditions are, with which this resolution should be attended. It must be sincere; it must be active; it must be constant. *Sincere*, to counteract all illusions; *active*, to prevent your repentance from being barren; *constant*, to secure you against a relapse.

That your good purposes may be acceptable to the Deity, they must, in the first place, be sincere; and in this regard I dare to aver, that we are generally deceived. It often happens, says St. Gregory, that the mind flatters and deludes itself; and to be satisfied of this, I only desire you to speak the truth. When you come to the confessional, you endeavour to persuade yourselves that you are firmly resolved to renounce your crimes for ever. But if you will deign to fathom the recesses of your heart, you will see that your design is not sincere; and that, at best, it is but very incomplete. Ah! Christians, hell is full of feeble purposes; if such desires as those could acquit the reprobate, their hell would soon be changed into the happiness of a paradise.

For it is not sufficient, brethren, to say I wish, I intend to reform my conduct. Thus it was St. Augustine reasoned, in the full pursuit of his evil habits. I mean to submit to the yoke of virtue; only let me have a few days more of pleasure. But oh! he says again, after grace had triumphed over his opposition, when we will, we must will in earnest. To what purpose these delays? Why defer? Why not set about the work immediately? Is not this however the disposition of too many? Like the sluggard, described by the Holy Ghost, they will, and they will not. They will, because they still think virtue eligible, or vice odious. And they will not; because they are not absolutely resolved to embrace the one and quit the other. Their desires are good; but they want the resolution to resist their vicious inclinations. They are loath to offend God; but at the same time, they would be glad to go on in their accustomed ways: i. e. according to the explication of St. Bernard, they would wish to be converted without forsaking their sins; to go to heaven without turning out of the path, that leads to hell. But be not thus imposed on, Christians. He, that desires the end, must use the means to attain it. It is a mere delusion to think yourselves penitents, when it is evident you have taken no precaution
against

against sin; and at most have only formed some inefficacious resolutions.

But would you see, dear friends, the model of a true purpose of renouncing vice effectually? St. Paul shall shew it to you. *I am sure*, he says, *that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor all creatures combined, shall be able to separate us from the love of God* Rom. viii. 38. The same, my brethren, should you say; but with a like sincerity and earnestness. Yet, although the consequence may be that I must beg my bread, I will spare nothing to make my neighbour amends for the injury I have done him, although the world may ridicule me; I will break off my foolish customs; although I may be reduced to the extremity of indigence, I will not hazard a false oath, to secure my rightful property. In a word, let what will happen; I am determined to suffer every thing, rather than offend my God. But how shall we know that these are not mere words? By the effects: i. e. let our resolution be active.

After all, this second condition of virtuous purposes is but a necessary consequence of the foregoing one: for if they be sincere, they will not confine themselves to promises, but will infallibly produce effects. Antiochus, whose determination to amend his life is only feigned, vents himself in protestations, and does nothing. Zachæus, on the contrary, whose desire of being converted is sincere, says not, *I will do*; but *I do*: *If I have wronged any man, I restore him four-fold*. Luke xix. 8. Here, says Tertullian, is our rule; we must not content ourselves with declarations, like the former; we must act like the latter. Otherwise, there can be no grounds to think our resolutions cordial: and let the following proof convince you of it. How do you know whether a person really wishes to benefit you, or only pays you some empty compliments? By the effects. Such a one tells you that all he has is at your command; by and by you are distressed for money, and have recourse to him for help; all his protestations are but wind. What do you infer from thence? That he only beguiled you with fair words, and was by no means sincere. Let us now see if your conduct, in regard to the Almighty, be not exactly similar. My God! you say, I am extremely sorry that I have offended thee; I will never do the like again. Nevertheless, you once more face the danger; you refuse to keep at a distance from such occasions; as have already triumphed over you. What do you hope to impose upon the Deity? No; he is not to be amused with flattering speeches. To appease his wrath we must not only promise, but perform.

Moreover if your determination to abandon vice be unfeigned, it must be active; if it be active, it must induce you to renounce not only sin, but all affection to sin. For it is much the same with those, who relinquish vice exteriorly, and at the same time harbour an inclination to it, as with a velerudinarian, who dares not eat some things he is fond of, because they are judged hurtful to him; i. e.

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he obtains from them with reluctance. Now, is not this the case in general with these self-called penitents? A person, for instance, addicted to impurity, will appear to change his disposition, on going to the sacraments; but, shortly after, you will find him hazarding licentious hints, and renewing his acquaintance with immodesty. Whereas, a true convert will not only detest the exterior acts of this vice, but will likewise do his utmost to efface every thought of it, avoid such company, as he may have formerly been too free in, and entreat his God to deliver him for ever from the assaults of this wicked spirit. Whence, of course, follow the third condition of a purpose of amendment, which, as I have said, is to be constant and durable; a condition no less necessary than those already mentioned.

When the Almighty Being vouchsafes to restore us to his favour, he does not seek to make a truce, but a peace with us. *Peace*, he says, *to men of good will*. But if, on coming to confess your guilt, you be not resolved rather to make every sacrifice, than offend your God again, it is not a peace you make with him, but a temporary suspension. You cease to frequent the company of your guilty associates, because Easter is at hand; but you mean to return to them, as soon as that term shall be expired. Is this to make your peace with God? Is it not rather to insult him? To be scoffers, as St. Augustine says, and not penitents?

The strongest proof of which, that I can give; and of which you must feel the whole force, if you will but listen to your conscience, is that the sorrow you have hitherto conceived for your transgressions, is not a sorrow inspired by heaven; but a sorrow altogether human. For as St. Paul says, *the sorrow, that is according to God, worketh penance steadfastly unto salvation*. 2 Cor vi. 10. Where remark that he terms it a *steadfast* penance, that must last for ever, and not for a time only. For, as Tertullian observes, where there is not a real change, there is no true repentance; because it fails to produce the effect, to which it is particularly applied.

After this, dear people, how can you persuade yourselves that a life, which is divided between vice and an apparent conversion, is a Christian life? Open the sacred books, and you will see that all those offenders, who were sincere in their repentance, were studious to avoid relapsing into their former evil habits. Magdalen, on her conversion, forsakes the path of vice. Matthew returns to his office no more; nor Zachæus to his employment. But all, having once made choice of virtue, adhere to it inviolably.

Such should be your conduct, Christians; whom I here exhort, with all my power, to take up the resolution to devote yourselves to your maker. Say to him from your hearts; yes, my God! the time is at length arrived for sin to be abolished in me, never more to be revived. I have given my promise to the Lord, and I will be faithful to it. My Saviour! my Father! may all this disposition be thy free gift, nor can it subsist without thee; preserve it then, I beseech

I beseech thee ; and as thou hast vouchsafed to be its author, so design to be its guardian. But to succeed herein effectually, there is nothing so conducive as to avoid the occasions of sin.

And to instruct you on this head, completely, I must inform you, friends, that there are two sorts of the occasions I mention. First, there are those, whose natural effect is to incite us to evil, as to read sensual books, to associate with the prodigate, &c. which occasions may be termed *active*. And there are others, that we may style *passive* occasions ; which are such as bring us into danger, not by their own intrinsic malice, but from relation to our frailty, or play of any kind to them, that know it to be a source of sinning to them ; or public diversions to those, who cannot frequent them without risk. Now, that our determination to avoid sin may be justly deemed sincere, active, and constant, I say that we must keep at a distance, from all occasions of this description ; and we will here examine briefly the necessity, the nature and extent, of the important duty.

First then, to convince you of its necessity, dear people, it may suffice to call an eye on our weakness, to be terrified at the sight of the danger. When I behold Adam, placed by the hand of God in the terrestrial paradise, created in innocence, and furnished with the most special graces, proving rebellious to his Creator, of the pervasion of his comfort ; alas ! I say to myself : what have not we to apprehend ? We, who are so frail, and assaulted in such a variety of shapes ? When I reflect on the unhappy fall of David, Peter, &c. I conclude that we are most strictly obligated to shun every occasion, that may lead us into sin. Weak, and surrounded with powerful enemies, flight is our best security.

For it is proper, you should be informed, Christians, that this attention to avoid occasions is the criterion, whereby to distinguish a genuine from a spurious conversion. The Scripture supplies an history extremely applicable to this subject. By the command of heaven, Saul is deputed to give battle to the Amalekites. God enjoins him expressly to put every thing to the sword. In disobedience to this order, he spares the life of their King, preserves their most valuable effects, and flatters himself still with having executed his commission. *I have fulfilled the word of the Lord*, he says. *What then meaneth*, replies Samuel, *this bleating of the flock, which soundeth in my ears ?* 1 Kings xv. 14. May I not apply this story to you, my brethren ? You suppose that you have fulfilled the word of the Lord, because you have laid your offences at the feet of a Priest. But ; and may I say it with an authority equal to that of Samuel ; what is it I yet hear then ? The voice of that female, who so often has been an instrument of sin to you ; the voice of those debauched companions, with whom you have been leagued in the most scandalous pursuits ; the voice of your neighbour, who reproaches you with your injustice. Ah ! you deceive yourselves. You have not accomplished fully what God required of you. You have

have done the work by halves only. It is running on your destruction to retain and adhere to those objects, that have so frequently proved your ruin.

And surely the person, who will not avoid the occasions of evil, cannot be said to hate it seriously; and of consequence can never be deemed a sincere and true penitent: since the sacred pen-man tells us that, *he, who loves the danger, shall certainly perish in it.* In fact, who can be persuaded that the man who refuses to shun the former occasions of his sin, does not retain an affection to them? Since it would be absurd to think that he who will confederate with the loose and abandoned, detests and abhors their company. But you say, I make no doubt, the necessity of avoiding the occasions of vice; although perhaps you are ignorant how far this obligation may extend.

And on this point the Gospel will satisfy you fully. *If thy hand or foot, says our Redeemer, scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than, having your hands or feet so, to be cast into everlasting fire.* Matt. xviii. 6. Such, my friends, is the doctrine of our Legislator and Master. And what does it imply? But that we are bound to relinquish every thing that provokes us to offend the Deity. A celestial doctrine, to which it is our duty to submit implicitly.

The *Wickedman* likewise, by a very simple comparison, gives us to understand how far this obligation of shunning the occasions of sin reaches. *Fly from them, he says, as from the face of a serpent.* Ecclesi. xii. 2. On which passage, interpreters enquire why we are not commanded to fear vice, as we should a lion or a tyger. Because these animals, they answer, ferocious as they become in time, are not violent, when young. But a serpent is at all times dreadful; its poison is dangerous from its very birth. Such, and still greater, should be the terror of a Christian in regard to sin. He should even fear it, before it shows itself; and avoid the first appearance of it, as the approach of a monster, which, from the instant of its birth, is sufficient to destroy him.

This is what we should do, to act prudently and wisely: nay, we should do more. By which I mean that it is not enough for a Christian, who has his salvation at heart, to shun the immediate occasions of sin, and such as would plunge him into vice intemperately; but he must dread the very face of sin, the most distant occasions of it; and that especially, when there is a probability of their reviving such evil propensities, as he may have formerly been subject to. Occasions of this description, weak and harmless as you may think them, St. Peter Chrysologus terms *smaller frebrands*, which the slightest breath is apt to rekindle. You promise, for instance, to drop all acquaintance with that person, who has led you into sin; but you keep the presents, you have received from him. Shall I then tell you what I think of it, and which possibly is but too true? If you do not relapse

recede into your former crimes; the desire of repeating them is not perhaps extinct.

If therefore your resolution to offend God no more be cordial, you will be attentive to find out whence your frailties take their rise. You will say, for example; what is the cause of these innumerable thoughts, that assault me? Is it not frequenting bills or that company; or an intemperate indulgence of my appetite? Whence the source of those slanders, and uncharitable discourses, respecting my neighbours, and them that displease me? Is it not my connexion with such or such people, who cannot open their lips, without detracting? What is the occasion of my swearing, or getting drunk so often? Is it not gaming or the ale-house? And the root being thus discovered, stop not there; but put your hand heartily to the work. Avoid those occasions; keep at a distance from that company; quit all drinking places, and every inclination to sin. In fine, hearken to St. Jerom, who tells you it is the extreme of folly to live quietly in a situation, in which you are continually exposed to the alternative, of either conquering, or perishing.

Nevertheless, oh wretched blindness! How many Christians are there, who so far from taking their precautions against the danger of occasions, court and invite them even; or at least, presume they shall come off victors whenever they please to try it? For it is a just observation, that there is hardly any point of morality, on which people are more industrious to find excuses than on this. But be sincere, my friends, and a few words will convince you how frivolous the pretences are, with which you endeavour to exculpate and palliate your remissness.

You do not mean, you say, to offend God by not forsaking such or such occasions. Ah! brethren, what a pitiful plea? Where is the sinner, be he who he may, the thief, the murderer, or what you please, that pretends directly to attack the Deity? Such an attempt can only be peculiar to hell. But although you have not a formal and explicit design of doing it, are you the less guilty of it in fact? What would you think of a man, who refusing to quit the flames, that surround him on every side, should say he had no intention to endanger or expose himself? Your folly is still greater, Christians, to imagine you shall not sin, amidst the allurements of iniquity.

However you hope, it seems, that God will assist you, although you continue in the occasion. But what assurance have you for thinking so? Where has he promised it? or to whom? Turn over the sacred pages: you will not find a single passage, in which the Lord ensures his grace to them, that wilfully persist in the occasions of vice. You will not find the example of any one sinner, to whom he has granted this favour. When God promises to support us under temptations, this is not meant of such trials, as we deliberately venture into. He has not pledged himself to work miracles, in order to authorize our presumption. It is true, he has preserved some holy persons under circumstances, that were particularly trying; the

the principles of Job, amidst the contagion of infidelity; the chastity of Joseph, from the solicitations of his master's wife; the virtue of Susanna, against the assaults of two old lechers. But observe, Christians, these were occasions, to which they had in no degree exposed themselves: and look upon it as a certainty that, if you wilfully meet the danger, it is more than probable you will fall in it.

From all this, dear people, what is to be concluded? unless that, if you desire to persist in your pious purposes, you must frequently have recourse to God, and say to him with the Apostles in the moment of danger, *save us, O Lord! we perish.* At present, by thy grace, our resolutions are firm; but we are encompassed with enemies, bent on our destruction. We have abjured vice, it is true; but have we abandoned all the occasions of it? If thou, O Lord! dost not support us, we still shall be lost. The first temptation will overcome us. We shall infallibly sink, if thou withholdest thy hand, though only for a moment. *Save us or we perish.* O God! our Creator! preserve the work of thy mercy; and grant that, as we have now formed the happy purpose of adhering to thee, we may be so courageous as to avoid the occasions, that may again involve us in a state of sin; and that, having served thee here on earth, we may possess thee for ever in heaven. Amen.

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T H E

TWELFTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the Love of God.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Luke x. 27.

TWO points, dear Christians, present themselves in this day's Gospel; on which, as our Redeemer assures us in another passage, the whole divine law depends: viz. the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. The following discourse I mean to confine entirely to the subject of the love of God; convinced that, if you but execute with fidelity this first and most momentous of all commands, you will surely observe the second; as it is a thing impossible not to love our neighbour, if we sincerely love the Deity.

Wherefore, without canvassing the views of the Jewish teacher, in proposing that question to Jesus Christ; *What must I do to possess eternal life?* let us humbly attend to the answer of this wise oracle. *What is written in the law?* Let us take this remark to ourselves, and apply it to our own instruction. What does the law ordain then? *how read we there? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*

But in what manner, you will ask? *With all thy heart, with all thy soul, with a'l thy strength.* Ib. Let us measure our love of God, my friends, by that which he has testified for us. His was a sincere love; it was an ardent love, The sincerity of his love induced him

to forsake the bosom of his heavenly Father, and take up his abode with us. The ardour of his love impelled him to embrace the ignominy of the cross. If therefore we desire to fulfil his sacred precept, let us return him the like affection, and love him as he has loved us. Let us love him with a sincere love ; i. e. let it be our study to please him, and our dread to offend him ; saying to him frequently with St. Augustine ; O my God ! I love thee, and it is my wish to love thee still more. Let us love him with an ardent love ; in adversity, as in prosperity ; in sickness, as in health. But principally let us love him with a love of preference : so as to love him above all things, and nothing else but for his sake. In order to excite the warmth of this divine charity in your breasts, Christians, I purpose, first, to shew you that the Lord deserves our whole love ; and secondly, to point out the means, by which we may be enabled to make him duly the return of love we owe him. Sacred model of heavenly affection ! assist us by thy grace, and infuse into our souls that light, which alone can guide us safely to the knowledge of thy truth.

We need but consult our reason, dear people, to be satisfied of this position, *that God merits our whole love*. Every thing assures us that nothing is so deserving of our affection and esteem, as a God, who has created us ; a God, who has redeemed us ; a God, who means to reward us with the enjoyment of himself. What he has already done for us in the order of *nature*, and in the order of *grace* ; and what he designs to add in future in the order of *glory*, are motives more than sufficient to convince the hardest understanding of the numerous inducements, we have, to love and venerate our God.

To be satisfied, dear people, that he merits all our love, on account of what he has done for us in the line of *nature* ; let us cast our eyes back on our original extraction. What were we then ? Absorpt in the abyss of *nothing*, a strong and mighty arm was requisite to draw us out of it. Of ourselves we were incapable of contributing any thing towards it. Nothing less could effect it than the hand of a Sovereign Being ; who, by the disposition of his adorable love, was pleased to free us from the gulph, in which we were immersed. It is God therefore, brethren, who created us ; it is God, who has distinguished us from the insensible herd of brutes, and stamped on our foreheads the glorious character of reason. No, said the mother of the Machabees, I did not make you what you are. *I neither gave you breath nor life ; neither did I frame the limbs of any of you*. Nothing of this is my work. It is the work of him, who made the heavens and the earth : it is the work of the sovereign Creator, *who formed the nativity of man, and found out the origin of all*, Mac. ii. 7. 22. What an unceasing sense of gratitude does not so signal a favour call for ? Could he be any ways interested in giving us this existence ? Would he otherwise have been less great, less happy,

happy, less God, in fine, than he is at present? No, my friends. It was our welfare solely then he consulted in this work, and in return for so great a blessing he requires only our love. Can we be so ungrateful as to refuse him his just due?

You want no exhortation to induce you to love your kindred, your friends, your benefactors. You readily share your affections with them, and make them a tender of your services. Neither need you be told to love perishable creatures, brethren. How common is it with us to affect them to a degree of folly even? For thee alone, our Creator! we cannot harbour the like sentiments. Neither thy power, thy bounty, thy munificence, nor thy goodness can soften our insensibility.

If you admire creatures; if you discover any good in them; from whence, I pray, is it derived, unless from the Deity? Go therefore to the fountain-head, to the primordial goodness. Go to that pure source; and do not draw upon yourselves the reproach, which God made formerly to his favoured nation: *My people hath done two evils: they have forsaken me the living fountain; and have dug to themselves cisterns, that can hold no water.*

From the benefit of our creation, to pass on to that of our preservation: is it not evident that the hand, which gave us our existence, still supports and preserves it? *In him we live*, says St. Paul, *we move and we exist.* Was he to withdraw his watchful care, although for a single instant only, the economy of our frames would soon dissolve; our vital powers would refuse their functions, and we should be reduced to the same condition, as if we never had existed. But oh! the mercies of our God! His almighty will ordained it, and we were produced out of nothing: his indulgence still prevails, and we are kept from relapsing into it. Each day, every moment, he is in the centre of us, to preserve, although he could annihilate us; and to maintain us in that being, which he originally gave us. And what does he ask of us in return for so many favours? Our love; that love, which he challenges so justly.

But, ungrateful wretches as we are, instead of loving and revering him, shall we carry our malice so far as to turn his gifts to his dishonour? Is this, may I say to you, my brethren, as the prophet said formerly to the Israelites, *Is this the return thou makest to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is it not he, who made and who created thee? Is he not thy Father?* Deut. xxxii. 6. You have abandoned God, who gave you life: and you have forgot the Lord, who still preserves it.

To these general proofs of his bounty add, if you please, my friends, the particular marks of affection, which he has, and continues daily to heap upon you so liberally. *What hast thou*, says the Apostle, *that thou hast not received?* 1 Cor. iv. 7. Who feeds you, but God? Who gives you strength to work and gain a livelihood,

but God ? Who preserves you in health, but God ? Who comforts you under your afflictions, but God ? Who heals your infirmities, but God ? Let the sense then of these, and the innumerable other favours, which you hourly receive from him, excite your hearty gratitude ; and whatever part of the creation you may in future cast your eyes upon, admire his wonders, and be thankful for his blessings.

What shall I render to the Lord, says the Psalmist, *for all he hath rendered to me ?* Ps. cxv. Thou, my God ! didst create me ; I will therefore devote my whole being to thy service. My eyes shall be fixed on thee alone : my hands shall be employed solely in executing thy commands : my mouth shall be opened to praise thee : all the powers of my soul shall be occupied in adoring thy infinite attributes. Thou shalt be as a seal on my heart, to secure it from every motion, that does not tend to bless thy mercies. But if David, notwithstanding so complete a dedication, still apprehended being cold and ungrateful to his Creator ; what would have been his fears, if like you, the sole return he had made to his gracious God, had been an injurious disgust, a criminal resistance ? How great would have been his alarm if, like you, he had seen, in his own person, all the rights of his maker violated, by obscenity, by drunkenness, by debauchery ? How lively his dread, if, in lieu of the aspirations, which his loving heart suggested, he had found it only disposed to offend and insult his God, by injustice, by detraction, by blasphemy ?

Another motive, Christians, to engage us to consecrate and devote our hearts to God, is that he hath loved us to such a degree, as to give us his only Son. To such an astonishing degree, I say. For it is no earthly sovereign, who has done us this honour. It is God himself. He has loved us, although we were useless to him, with a gratuitous love. He has loved us, although we were his enemies, with a generous love. He has loved us, not only so far as to give us our life, and to preserve us in the enjoyment of it ; but to such a pitch even, as to bestow upon us his own, his well beloved, his only Son.

To conceive the happiness of our redemption, let us reflect on the state we were reduced to by sin, and on the condition to which the divine grace has exalted us. Sin had made us enemies to the Deity, and undeserving of his further notice. But (thanks to our Saviour who has emancipated us from this evil) of enemies, we are become his friends, his children, and coheirs, to say more to the glory of his kingdom. Alas ! my God ! if all the gratitude of my soul could be scarcely competent to express my acknowledgment for the favour of my creation, to which thy word alone was sufficient ; what effusions of love does not the blessing of my redemption claim, which thou wert pleased to effect by the sacrifice of thy blood ? But why, my Jesus ! must thou bleed ? Would not thy tears have been enough ? Yes ; they would have amply sufficed to appease the
justice

justice of thy Father; but in no degree to satisfy the tenderness of thy charity. And is it possible, dear friends, the only return he requires of us should be that of our love? Is it possible there should be hearts, so callous and impenetrable, as to withhold this love from him?

Divine Saviour! take possession of my heart, and kindle in it thy sacred flames. I can say; and you can say with me, brethren; nay, we are all bound to say; the Son of God *has loved me*; and because *he has loved me, he has given himself for me*. Gal. ii. 20. For me, I say; and I refuse to give myself to him; I do not live for him; I do not think of him! what a mystery is my heart! Abel is murdered by his brother; Job covered with ulcers; Joseph sold for a slave; David insulted by his son. It was for my sake they suffered; yet my heart, by a mutual sensibility, sympathizes with them. To redeem me, Jesus Christ was insulted like David; was sold like Joseph; was covered with wounds like Job; in fine, was murdered like the unhappy Abel; and my heart, my inconsistent heart, can scarcely interest itself in his sorrows. What more, ungrateful, obdurate Christians! must God do to merit your love? Do not the outrages he bore, the humiliations he stooped to, the torments he endured, plead loud enough in his favour? To remain insensible to such proofs of his unbounded affection, is in fact to oppose an excess of ingratitude to an excess of love. It is to insult the redemption effected by Jesus Christ, and trampled on his grace.

If the sight of such inestimable favours makes no impression on you, my friends, tell me what can. But, O God! we begin to feel the weight of our ingratitude; grant that henceforth we may love thee as much as hitherto we have slighted thee; and that the greatness of thy bounty may at once be the motive and the measure of our future love.

It is certain that we are bound to love God for the blessings we receive from him in this life; had we nothing to expect at his hands in the life to come. But there are eternal goods besides, which he has authorized us to hope for, if we serve him with fidelity: even the possession of himself; which all may look for from his justice, who await his coming patiently in the discharge of his obligations. Let us adhere closely to this *blessed hope*. Let us love the Lord, because he has created, and now preserves us; let us love him, because he has redeemed, and still crowns us with benedictions; and finally, let us love him, because he will hereafter be our great reward; our last end, our sovereign good.

Yes, divine Saviour! I hope that thou wilt perfect in me the work of thy benevolence. Such is my hope, in defiance of my past sins; because I consider them as cancelled by thy infinite merits. Such is my hope, in defiance of my present infirmities; because I look up to thee as the supplement of my justice. Such, in fine, is my hope,

hope, in defiance of every future temptation ; because I believe thee to be near to defend and support me.

But what, my friends, is required of us to make that return to our God, which he challenges on so many titles ? *Thou shalt love him*, says our Preceptor, *with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength*.

Where observe, Christians, that it is not only our heart the Lord demands ; but it is our whole heart ; for our love must be undivided and without reserve. To love God with all our heart is to consider him as our last end ; as that main and grand object, to which every other affection must be ultimately referred. It is to think nothing, to say nothing, to do nothing, that is not perfectly consistent with the charity which he exacts. It is to love him without dissimulation ; and not as that false people loved him, whom our Saviour reproaches that *they honoured him with their lips, while their hearts were far from him*. Matt. xv. 8. It is to esteem him above every thing ; to put nothing in competition with him ; to love him preferably to all things. It is to offer him an entire heart, a heart unshared ; for *woe to them that are of a double heart*. Eccl. xii. 14. In short, it is to love nothing with him, which we do not love purely for his sake. For as he has purchased our affection at the expense of his life, he will never consent to put up with a rival.

Behold then, brethren, your want of fidelity, when you agree to divide your heart between God and his creatures : when you give the world a share in that affection and love which he claims entirely. How many perhaps are you acquainted with, who, solely bent on their temporal interests, go so far as to forget their Maker and neglect his service, and that even on such days as should be wholly devoted to him ? He allows you, Christians, to gain a livelihood, to cultivate your lands, and to pursue and enjoy the profits of your labour. If you direct your employments to him, by making his service your ultimate intention ; you act for him, you work for him, and you pay him that tribute of love he is so justly entitled to. But what irritates him is, that you are so eager in the pursuit of gain, as to withhold from him the love he requires as his due. Might I not, with justice, address that severe reproach to you which the Prophet Elias made to those Jews who divided their heart between God and Baal. How long will you be doubtful ? If the Lord be the true God, why do you hesitate to serve him ? Or if Baal be your Deity, why not give yourselves to him ? The like I say to you, my friends, each individual of whom I should be happy to gain to Christ. Examine, and see who the Supreme Being is that challenges your service. If he be the Lord of heaven and earth, who insists on your loving him with an undivided affection, determine either to follow or forsake him at once. But, if the proposal of forsaking God shocks you, as it certainly must, resolve upon giving yourselves
to

to him entirely ; upon loving him in the manner he exacts of you, i. e. with all your heart and with all your soul.

Now, it will be an easy matter to decide whether or no you love the Lord as you ought, by enquiring if you do, for his sake, what they who love the things of the world do, in order to obtain the possession of them. No reasonings are wanted to solve this point ; your practice alone is sufficient to decide it. What is there you do not attempt, to acquire and obtain money ? From the break to the close of day you toil with diligence, with perseverance, with pleasure. No drudgery deters, no difficulties obstruct, no perils affright you. And why ? because you love that money which you grasp at so eagerly. Decide for yourselves then, Christians. Can you say you love God ? You, who will not submit to any inconvenience for his service, and yet defy all opposition when your temporal interest is in question ? If you can think that you love him with this mode of acting, be better informed by the Apostle of love, St. John, who tells you, that he *that saith he knoweth or loveth him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* John ii. 2. 4.

Know, my friends ; for it is a matter of importance, it behoves you to know ; that, by the most common, accustomary, and indifferent actions, you have it in your power to give proofs of your love of God ; if you be but careful to exclude from them whatever is sinful and offensive to his presence. Thus, the concerns of your family, your daily labours, the employments of your profession ; every thing, in short, as the Apostle says, *whether you eat, or whether you drink,* may have God for its end, may be referred to him, and may confirm you in his charity.

Away then with that coolness, which, to palliate its indifference, dares to allege the duties and obligations of its state, as obstacles to this active love. No great sacrifice is required of you, says a holy Father ; no painful or laborious efforts. All that is demanded is to permit this sacred charity to excite, animate, invigorate you, and diffuse its enlivening glow over all your actions. Nothing further will be necessary to deserve that approbation, which the Lord gave in person to the fidelity of Abraham ; *Now I know thou fearest God.* Gen. xxii. 12. You complain that the hurry and embarrassments of your calling prevent you from attending to him ; and that you are busied from the dawn of day with your necessary occupations. It may be so. But direct your work to the Lord ; labour with an intention to accomplish his will ; and I will be answerable for your love and respect ; *Now I know thou fearest God.* You, who seem to have been introduced on the theatre of life only to suffer from poverty, from sickness, or from distress, suffer cheerfully, because, such is the will of your Creator, and he himself will assure you that you reverence and love him ; *Now I know thou fearest God.* Ye parents, employ yourselves, in a spirit of Christianity, in feeding the little ones, his providence hath blessed you with : Ye children, be

docile and submissive to your parents. In a word, all you that hear me, whatsoever be your condition, do every thing for God's sake, and with the desire of serving him; and be convinced that you love him in the manner he requires.

To love the Lord with all our strength, is to love him constantly and with perseverance. Our love of God is unworthy of his regard, unless it be eternal like himself. To love him as he demands, we must not be contented with a transitory love, which withers as soon as it buds almost. Continual benefactions call for a never-ceasing gratitude: this is a settled principle, a principle which all the Fathers have endeavoured to inculcate. St. Augustine, commenting on those words of David, *Seek ye the Lord, seek his face evermore*, argues thus; *Why seek the Lord?* Either we shall, or shall not find him. If we are sure not to find him, why should we seek him? And if we are certain of finding him, what necessity of searching for him. Alas! subjoins this Saint, we must seek him without ceasing, whom we must love without intermission. Of this we see a figure in the book of Leviticus; where the Lord commanded the Israelites to keep upon their altars a continual fire; *the fire on the altar should always burn*; Levit. vi. 11. and, for this purpose, he appointed ministers, whose employment was to feed and preserve it in its vigour: wherefore to love God is not enough Christians. Our love of him must be durable. After the example of these ministers, we must be attentive to keep it up, and nourish it with proper fuel. An affection that is not constant, can never be sincere.

Where are those among you, Christians, who love your God in this manner? How many, on the return of some festival, or in certain fits of devotion, which now and then occur, declare that they love him? But these solemnities being passed, does not their ardour quickly evaporate, and give place to their former indifference?

I have to reproach you, says the Deity, by the mouth of the beloved disciple, with having abandoned me, after so many protestations of attachment. What is become of that affection which you vowed to me so repeatedly at the foot of the altar? I now see nothing in you but a languid and feeble charity. What excuse can you offer in vindication of your fickleness? Is it the difficulty of loving the Lord uniformly and constantly? A truly frivolous pretence, says St. Augustine. It is a much easier matter to adhere to God than to creatures. Disgust cannot fail to be the consequence of such connexions; for defects will appear, and imperfections betray themselves. But in the love of God there are no mortifications to be experienced, nothing offensive to be apprehended. Or, if there should be any briars to molest and give pain, love will blunt their acuteness, and make them bearable.

O Lord! I here offer to thee the hearts of all those that compose this assembly; and I hope there is no one present that will dissent from what I do. No, my sovereign good! I will henceforth love
nothing

nothing but thee. For what have I in heaven? and beside thee what do I desire on earth? Thou art the God of my heart, the God of my soul, my inheritance, my portion for ever. Psalm lxxii. 25. Enable me then, I beseech thee, to love thee incessantly and fervently. Thou art my weight, my bias, who dost incline me whichsoever way thou pleasest. *My soul thirsteth after thee.* Pf. xli. 2. When will the happy day arrive in which I shall appear before my God. Ib. and declare my love to him? May I expire in the embraces of thy charity, my God! and yield up my life in those breathings of affection, in which must commence my everlasting felicity. Amen.

T H E

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

ON PERSEVERANCE.

Thy faith hath made thee whole. Luke xvii. 19.

ONE of the most important and weighty maxims established by the gospel, and on which the whole œconomy of salvation depends, is this, that we can promise ourselves no future happiness, unless we steadily continue to obey the mandates of religion. It is not enough to solicit, or even to receive from Christ the cure of our present infirmities. We must *give glory to God* with this Samaritan, and adhere to him uniformly, if we would be blessed with those words; *thy faith hath made thee whole.* He, says our divine oracle, *shall be saved, who shall persevere* in the practice of virtue, not for a day, a month, or many years even, but *to the end* of his life. Perseverance then alone can ensure salvation. It is some advance, indeed, to choose the right road, and walk in it: but this alone will not suffice. To conduct us to the term of the inheritance proposed to us, our endeavours must be crowned with persistence and constancy. *He that persevereth to the end, he shall be saved.* Matt. xxiv. 13. And to instruct you, brethren, on so essential a point, which must be decisive of your eternal welfare, I design at present to lay before you, first, the motives that should induce you to continue firm to your duty; and secondly, the perils, to which you wilfully expose yourselves by an inconstancy of virtue. Jesus, the lover
and

and seeker of our souls! enable us by thy grace to be attentive to our welfare; a blessing we now supplicate through thy powerful mediation.

To engage you to walk with steadiness in the road of salvation, Christians, I here offer thee motives, which, if you allow them their weight, cannot fail to succeed. The first is the quality of the master whom you serve: the second, the insult offered him when you abandon his service: the third, the consolations of which you thereby deprive yourselves. A brief investigation of the motives here proposed, will, I flatter myself, rouse and invigorate your zeal.

And first, dear people, one of the strongest motives to induce you to persevere in God's service is his admirable power; that sovereign power, of which the scriptures exhibit so many and such convincing proofs. *He spoke, says the holy text, and they were made.* Psalm cxlviii. 5. What instances of this attribute did he not display to the Jews; particularly when he meant to free them from the bondage of Egypt? You doubtless know this history. At the presence of Moses, the waters of the sea divide, and leave an open passage for the children of Israel: and at his command they again unite and swallow up the host of the pursuing Egyptians. Whence that celebrated canticle, which will exist an everlasting monument of the power of the Supreme Being. *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord! Who is like to thee in holiness, terrible and praise-worthy? Who, but thou, can do such wonders?* Exodus xv. 11.

Behold the productions of nature, which, though common, are not the less astonishing. See the formation of the most minute insects, and consider the wonders of their structure. But if the Deity, says Tertullian, be so admirable in the smallest things, how does his power shine out in those larger works of the creation, which we cannot reflect upon without amazement? And what is the result of these reflections? God is infinitely great; therefore I should worship him constantly. What! shall a being so powerful demand our homage, and we refuse it? Shall he require us to be ever faithful, and we grow tired with offering him the slender tribute of our respects?

But the Most High, who thus exacts our constant service, is not only infinitely powerful, my friends; he is also infinitely good, and good to us. How many proofs present themselves in evidence of what I assert? First, he has loved us eternally; he has loved us gratuitously; he has loved us undeservingly. Secondly, he has redeemed us from the state of perdition, in which we were involved; by sending his only Son among us; *that whosoever believeth may not perish, but may have everlasting life.* Thirdly, he spares us; he bears with us; he withholds his hand from striking when we insult him. Fourthly, to these numerous marks of his kindness, add that multitude of favours which he lavishes upon us. For we have nothing but through his bounty. *What hast thou, says the Apostle, that thou*
hast

hast not received? 1 Cor. iv. 7. No, Christians, we possess nothing; whether temporal or spiritual, but what is immediately the gift of this our amiable God.

Now, if the sense of these blessings had such an effect on David, as to induce him incessantly to glorify the Lord, how is it possible that we should be so wretchedly ungrateful? How is it possible we should be tired of serving our Benefactor? The Angels are continually in the presence of his Sovereign Majesty; and why should not we, as well as they, make it our only business to do his will? The queen of Sheba said to Solomon, *Blessed art thy servants who stand before thee always and hear thy wisdom.* 3 Kings x. 8. And wherefore, Christians, do you not deem it your truest happiness to be always in the presence of your God, and your greatest misfortune to be separated from him? You forsake him; but do you know the injury you do him? The second motive I mean to make use of to engage you to perseverance.

But to serve God then, you will say, is it requisite to be so remarkable? May we not be virtuous, and yet live like other people? I confess, my friends, this point is not easily to be decided. Our God is a jealous God; he will not suffer a division; he insists on our declaring for him, not only openly, but constantly. To adhere to the Deity and the world at the same time, is a thing utterly impossible. For if God loves you more than the generality of mankind; and if, in consequence of his love, he requires more of you; in these circumstances how will you act? If unfortunately you incline to the side of the world, what can you think of it yourselves? Is it not to be guilty of the most vile ingratitude, the most crying injustice? This, Christians, is the fatal rock, against which our Saviour cautions us, when he says, that he who pretends to serve two masters, will of necessity *love the one, and despise the other.* Matt. vi. 24. What is it you do then, when from timidity, or any human respects whatever, you forsake the service of your Maker? It is, as if you said; Lord! I would serve thee in preference to the world, if I could but elude the censures of mankind; I esteem virtue, and I should be glad to practise it; but if I do not fulfil my obligations to thee, it is because the world will not permit me. Can you conceive a greater ingratitude, a grosser baseness?

Moreover, observe, dear people, how culpable your way of acting is, when you pretend to share your hearts between God and sordid creatures. You would be glad to serve the Deity; but you desire to join the world and your destructive passions with him.

Do you not see then that you put the objects to which you pay so great an attention, on a level with your Creator? You make of them so many divinities; i. e. you raise up to yourselves other Gods besides the true one. A crime, which the Lord has always viewed in a most black and offensive light; because as he is the only living God, he will never suffer any thing to be placed on an equality, or even in competition with him.

Add

Add to all this, Christians, that in forsaking our Sovereign good, we bid adieu to all contentment. For in short, can we be happy when at variance with him? Whatever we may do to suppress the remorse of a galled conscience, we cannot hide from ourselves that we are at enmity with God; that we live under the Dominion of the Devil, and that we are continually exposed to the danger of being lost. We see hell open, and we know that we are liable to be cast into it every moment.

On the contrary, you, who are faithful to your God, step forth and declare your feelings; those tender emotions of joy and gratitude that gently agitates your hearts, and fan the flames of heavenly charity. Endeavour then, my friends, to find the Lord. Attach yourselves to him: forsake him not, and you will never be in want of any thing. You will be filled with spiritual consolations, the most precious of all things. You will be satisfied with the temporal goods that God shall please to give you. You will thank him for them; and, with however parsimonious a hand he may have dealt them out to you, you will acknowledge his liberal bounty, and that you have still a larger portion of them than you can possibly deserve. These motives, may be sufficient, I hope, to induce you to be faithful to your Maker, and to serve him with perseverance. I will next touch upon the dangers, to which an inconstancy in virtue lays you open.

Two very simple propositions, brethren, will shew you what these dangers are. First, the means of salvation, which would be productive of the conversion of other sinners, are often useless and invalid to the fickle and unstable. Secondly, the obstacles of salvation, which are with difficulty surmounted by other sinners, are infinitely harder to be overcome by an offender of the above cast. Two reflections that are calculated to make you sensible how much it concerns you to persevere in virtue resolutely.

And to take up this matter properly, Christians, let us consider what the usual means of conversion are. The bare exposition of them will convince you they are but too often lost on an inconstant person, who grows tired in the perseverance of his God. The first resource that grace makes use of to reclaim the straying sinner, is, according to St. Paul, the knowledge of the truth. This discovers to him the world and eternity in their genuine colours, in which, till then, he had never viewed them. Then it is that the soul, undeceived and clearly enlightened, sees the nothingness of all sublunary things, and the solidity of those of heaven; the emptiness of creatures, and the plenitude of the Creator; in a word, the paltry vanity of all that is not God.

The second resource of salvation, favourable to ordinary sinners, is the influence of such heavenly gifts, as grace diffuses in their hearts; and to which the Lord generally adds a certain gust and relish for virtue. Grace strews the first steps of repentance with a sensible consolation, a secret pleasure we experience in bearing a yoke,

yoke, that had hitherto appeared intolerable; a solid content which the heart feels on being enlightened of its heavy burthen. *Thou hast broken my bonds*, says David, at the beginning of his conversion. Howsoever bitter my chalice, O God! I receive it with joy. The tongues of men do not deter me; on the contrary, they confirm my resolution. *I said in my excess every man is a liar*. Yes, O Lord! I prefer being ranked among thy servants and children, to all the crowns the universe can offer. *I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid*. Pf. cxv. But all these means, my friends, are lost on those giddy people, who, in a fit of devotion, vow allegiance to their Maker, and yet return to the world in the same breath almost.

I do not exaggerate, Christians, when I say that the knowledge of the truth; that resource, which is so beneficial to other offenders, becomes useless to those here mentioned. And indeed, have they not a thousand times defeated the aims of heaven, by their levity and mutability? For what further impression can the principles of faith make on them? Previously to their fall, they were conversant in those paths which these same principles discover to every one. Informed and enlightened, they were by no means ignorant of the immensity of the eternal rewards; of the emptiness of the world's promises; of the vanity of its allurements; of the nothingness of all but God. Grace then has no fresh helps in store for you, inconsistent sinners, as it has for others. You are no longer struck, dazzled, overpowered by their light; and, if they are not entirely extinguished in you, at least they have lost the charms of novelty, which has so much influence on other converts. But this is not all, dear people. For I add moreover, that your condition is truly deplorable, if you are so unfortunate as to be of the number of those, who, after frequent returns to God, as often quit his service. What method must grace adopt to attract you to her, and fix your unsteadiness? You, who have already a thousand times gone over from grace to sin, from virtue to vice? What untried inspiration can be offered to you? What additional gift of the Holy Ghost, that you have not already frequently received, tasted and despised? To triumph over a soul that has hitherto been insensible, a single call is often sufficient. But what effect can the most powerful attractions of grace produce on your hearts, habituated to melt; and which no sooner recover from their fall, than they are ready to relapse again? I have no intention herein to harrow up any one's conscience with idle terrors; but to rouse all from their torpor: and I declare to them, after Jesus Christ, that it is next to an impossibility to be saved in such a state. *No one*, says our Redeemer, *that puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God*: Luke ix. 62. that is to say, that of all men, there is no one less likely to obtain a share in his inheritance than the man who grows weary in the prosecution of his duty.

Ye foolish Galatians! may I say with St. Paul; who, beginning in the spirit, end shamefully by the flesh. Indolent labourers! who,
having

having taken up the plough, forsake the householder's field, because it appears over-run with briars. Dastardly soldiers! who, though enrolled under the standard of the cross, give up your arms so tamely. The Son of God already disowns you for his children, whatever degree of zeal you may have testified at first. For he alone, he says, shall be saved, who shall have persevered to the end; and they solely must expect the crown of life, who shall have been faithful to the conclusion.

But what principally should make such persons tremble as desert the service of God, is that one of the chief effects of inconstancy in virtue, is not only to obstruct the facility of repentance, but also to augment its difficulties. In fact, every sinner finds many impediments, that are almost insurmountable, when he labours at his conversion: the abyss of his conscience, which he must fathom; the impetuosity of his passions, which he must subdue; the wrath of a God, whom he must appease. Now all these obstacles, which are capable of deterring other offenders from a change of life, are much more unconquerable in regard to those that are of a wavering and uncertain mind. Into what a frightful detail might I not here enter, brethren, did time permit it? But I choose rather, for your instruction, to make use of what remains to shew you briefly the measures you must resort to, in order to be faithful to the Lord, and to serve him with perseverance.

The first of these is to consider what you are. You are Christians, i. e. children of God, members and brothers of Jesus Christ. Know your dignity therefore; apply yourselves seriously to support this august character, and take care never to degenerate from it.

How many actions do you every day perform, dear people, that would be highly agreeable to the Deity, were you but solicitous to refer them to him? Your hard and laborious work, your want of rest, the contradictions you daily meet with, &c. Scarce do the rigours of the most austere religious orders exceed the hardships, which some of you are obliged to undergo to obtain a livelihood. Wherefore then will you lose the fruits of so many labours? Ah! Christians; would you but accustom yourselves to think of God, and act for him, how happy might you be? You would work out your salvation quietly and easily; you would persevere in righteousness, and carry with you to the tribunal of God, a treasure of good works. To think of the Lord, therefore, and to act for him, is a second help.

Finally, a third, and the last measure I propose to you, is to avoid the fellowship of the wicked, and all evil communication. This I have already often hinted at: and to speak the truth, it is a point that cannot too frequently be inculcated; as, in general, bad company is the cause of your being so neglectful of your duties, and the source of many crimes, into which you are imprudently betrayed. But know that you should look upon such people as your avowed and certain enemies, and that there is nothing more dangerous to you than

than acquaintances of this kind. Take up therefore to-day, my friends, the resolution to persist in virtue. Be convinced, that on this persistence, as I cannot too often inculcate, your eternity depends. Make use of the numerous means which are given you for this purpose. Be faithful to God, and God will be faithful to you.

Ye penitent souls! it is to you that I address myself, in concluding this discourse. Frame to yourselves a just idea of what you have to do, to persevere steadily in the grace conferred upon you. You have perhaps relinquished the occasions of your sins; if so, you have done a great deal; but this is not yet all. You must expose yourselves to them no more; and if unfortunately they occur, you must resist them. You have chosen the path of justice; this is much; but it is not still enough. You must run on in it, and run in such a manner, that, like the Apostle, you may reach the goal. And as to the rest, be not dejected at that continual progress in virtue which the gospel and your God require of you. The most difficult part is over with you that are converted. The road to heaven is narrow; but to whom? To those who enter it with reluctance. It is wide and spacious to such as have already made some progress in it. The yoke of Christ is heavy; but to whom? To them that are beginning to take it up. It is light and pleasant to such as carry it resolutely. Be not disheartened then, Christians. There is an art in mollifying the rigours, to which a perseverance in piety subjects us. And this art is, that which St. Paul made such successful use of; viz. to keep our eyes fixed on the end of our career, and to have ever in view our divine model Jesus Christ, his example, his assistance, and his promises. Let these considerations animate us to a steady and faithful perseverance here on earth; as the only means of being hereafter crowned in heaven; to which term I entreat the Almighty Being to conduct us. Amen.

T H E
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY
After P E N T E C O S T.

On P R O V I D E N C E.

I say to you be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat ; nor for your body, what you shall put on. For your father knoweth that you have need of all these things.

Matt. vi. 25 and 32.

THE design of the Son of God, Christians, in the lesson here laid before us, is to root out of our hearts that anxiety and solicitude for the things of life, which engross the greatest part of mankind. To comprehend his meaning, you must know that the Pharisees, at whom he here particularly points, attributed all events to fate. They depended wholly on themselves, allowing nothing to providence, or that supernatural agency, which directs the universe. But at the same time, I desire you to remark, my friends, that our Redeemer, in enforcing the necessity of trusting to providence, does not intend to inspire us with a rash and presumptuous confidence, which would persuade us to live in idleness, and expect our support from above. Let us enter into the views of our Saviour, and make this consoling inference ; that if our heavenly Father furnishes a livelihood for the very birds ; he will at least do as much for us : that if they find a maintenance who are unable to work ; we, on whom this bountiful God has bestowed both the ability of working, and the hopes of enjoying the fruit of our labours, have no occasion to apprehend the supply of our necessities.

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And here, dear people, let me ask you ; is this the idea you have formed of the goodness of the Deity ? Your wants are all open to him ; *for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.* Can he then forget you, and suffer you to languish ? Or if he does permit it, is it not for your advantage ? Were we but careful to consider God in the light we ought ; to live under the guidance of his providence, as children under the government of their parents, only solicitous to please him, how solid and permanent would our happiness be ?

It would give me therefore the greatest satisfaction to infuse into your mind a reasonable and christian way of thinking on this subject of the divine providence. And, to endeavour to effect it, I will at present call your attention, brethren, to two simple propositions, which shall make the plan of this discourse. First, we must confide in providence. Secondly, we must submit to providence. But to proceed in a regular form, let us first make application to the God of mercy for his assistance, through the mediation of his beloved Son.

When I say that we should confide in providence, I do not speak of that blind and mistaken confidence, whose tendency is to prevent us from labouring for the preservation of our being. No ; an industrious application to the affairs of life is but reasonable and just. To act otherwise, would be to tempt God. What I condemn is that diffident and timid forecast ; which depends more upon itself and its own exertions than on heaven. Now, I say that his distrust is unworthy of a Christian, for these two reasons : first, because it is injurious to Providence ; and secondly, because avidity and worldly greediness is its source.

No wonder that the heathens, who were either ignorant of the Divinity, or, at best, had but imperfect notions of him, should be wholly taken up with the concerns of this world ; because their views went no further. Deprived of the light of truth, enveloped with the gloom of idolatry, they knew not that Sovereign Providence, which governs human affairs, and directs them with infinite wisdom.

But for you, dear Christians, and myself, who each of us confess a benevolent and supernatural agency, watchful for our protection, and attentive to our wants ; for us, I say, to be so anxious, would it not be to act against our conscience and give the lie to our faith ? This is what Christ would have us to understand, when he says ; *Be not solicitous, saying, what shall we eat, or wherewith shall we be clothed, as the heathens say ; for your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.* Matt. vi. 32. What more can be desired, my friends, to calm your anxiety and remove your diffidence, than the sole conviction, which we have, or ought to have, of being in the hands of a God : i. e. of a being, whose attention is sufficiently awakened to be sensible of our wants : whose prudence is sufficiently enlightened to provide for our necessities ; whose kindness is so bene-
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ficent as not to leave us in distress ; whose care is so extensive as to watch over each part of his creation, to support and to preserve it : in the hands of a liberal God, *who clothes the grass of the field with more beauty, than even Solomon was arrayed with in all his glory ?* How can you imagine, brethren, that a God like ours ; vested with such attributes, can forsake and abandon man, the most noble of his works ? In effect, was it not for him he commanded the earth to bring forth her fruits ? Was it not for him he enjoined the seasons their successive order ? And if this God of bounty and munificence seems at any time to forget us, let us blame ourselves alone, who have previously forgot him. Let us but be faithful to him, and we may be confident of always finding in him an assured resource. *Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.* Ib. 33.

To be solidly convinced of this animating truth, open the sacred volumes. The manna falls from heaven for the sustenance of the Israelites. David, pressed by hunger, has recourse to the high Priest, who gives him the loaves of proposition, or the sanctified bread. The oil and flower are increased in the charitable hands of the widow of Sarepta. The dejected Elias falls asleep under a tree, and upon awakening, is comforted with the sight of a loaf, miraculously conveyed to him. All these are the wonders of Providence : wonders, which are often renewed, though not so visibly, in favour of such of God's servants, as cordially repose their whole confidence in him.

And as for you, my dear people, who sometimes complain of and are discontented with Providence, would you know the reason why your undertakings miscarry ? Because you diffide in the divine protection, and act as if there was no such thing. You think to secure and protect yourselves from danger by the precautions, you make use of. But rather dread lest this same Providence, which you insult so daringly, should sport with your designs, and make a jest of your false wisdom. Abandoned to disquiet, tormented by the fear of losing what you already possess, and by the desire of obtaining that which is not yet yours, you shall drag on your days in trouble and alarms. The projects, you have formed, shall surely come to nothing. You shall hoard up, and God shall dissipate. You shall sow, and God shall destroy. It is thus, O Lord ! thou treatest those, who distrust thy direction ; and who, under the pretence of providing for their wants, seek only to please and satisfy their avarice. For there is no doubt, my friends, but this excessive anxiety is not only injurious to the Lord, but that it is founded moreover on avidity, and the greediness of a worldly spirit.

Nothing more specious, than the pretexts alleged to authorize these distrusts, and palliate our avarice. It is allowed indeed, on all sides that, in our researches, salvation should hold the first place. But, after all, we must live, you say ; we are incumbered with large families, and they must be provided for. So far is just and

equitable. But to take oblique and indirect ways to obtain your ends, brethren, is what I condemn: this is what you try to justify: this is what avarice prompts you to regard as innocent. But two short reflections, Christians, will fully disabuse you. The first will shew that you pursue your temporal welfare with much more eagerness, than your eternal; and the second, that, in your endeavours to gain a livelihood, you do not confine yourselves to what is merely necessary.

What is it then to act upon a principle of avidity and the greedy spirit of the world? It is to subvert the order established by God. It is to love the creature more than the Creator. It is to prefer earth to heaven, and time to eternity. Now, are not these your sentiments? Does not the ardour, you betray in quest of temporal things, plainly indicate that you give them the preference of those of futurity? You have long since been admonished to exert yourselves in mastering those habits of drinking, swearing, impurity, &c. that lord it over you. Involved as you are in the concerns of life, you pay but little attention to such remonstrances at present? We will think, you say, of salvation, when we shall have made ourselves comfortable. But permit me to ask you, dear people; if the application which you give to the world, was nothing more than reasonable, would it influence you so far, as to make you insensible to the interests of heaven? It is lawful, I agree with you, to make a due provision for yourselves and families. But, is it lawful to devote your time exclusively to such employments? Is it lawful to be so alive to the acquisition, or to the loss of temporal goods; and so callous, so dead, to the loss of salvation and of your souls?

Alas! my friends, how differently does the serious Christian think and act in this respect? Conscious of the dignity of his origin, and the excellence of his last end; convinced of the uncertainty of his abode in this world; all his desires tend to heaven: and, whenever necessity calls his thoughts down to the earth, his tranquillity is in no degree impaired. He goes on without disturbance, without emotion; because his views are regulated by reason and by faith. He demands of God nothing more than what the gospel terms his daily bread; and if he endeavours to screen himself from the rude attacks of poverty, he dreads still more the gilded shafts of opulence.

Are these your dispositions, Christians? Can you affirm that by your anxious solicitude, by that continual stir, in which you live, you mean nothing more than to procure what is simply necessary? But what are your ideas in this regard? To consult the gospel on this point, necessities are confined to very narrow limits. If you have food and raiment, be contented, says St. Paul. To provide therefore for the wants of nature, to live suitably, and in proportion to circumstances is all that can be deemed necessary in the opinion of the sacred writings.

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Examine then impartially if the extent of your designs and projects goes no farther than to acquire bare necessities. If it does, you have every reason to apprehend. For a similar fate will attend the wealth, which you hoard up beyond the calls of necessity, as befel the manna of those rapacious Israelites, who gathered beyond the appointed measure i. e. the worms destroyed it. In like manner, if avidity directs you in the pursuit of riches here, fear lest they be made hereafter the subject of your reprobation: or, at least, lest what you have treasured up with so much trouble, be suddenly and effectually dispersed. But to confide in Providence is not enough; a good Christian must be submissive and obedient to its ordinances.

Nothing is more equitable, and nothing more uncommon also, than a christian submission to the lovely will of Providence. St. Augustine supplies us with an excellent ground for our behaviour in this regard. On one side, he says, consider the majesty of this Deity, and on the other, your own weakness. He is all-powerful, should we say; and we are infirmity itself. It is but reasonable therefore that we should bow respectfully to his designs. In a word, it is just that we should obey the ordinances of Providence; it is advantageous and beneficial.

Were we to reflect attentively on the bonds, that unite the creature to the Creator: that he is our master, and we his servants; he our father and we his children; we should quickly become sensible how just it is to obey him. I say more, we should comprehend that *since all things, as the scripture testifies, are subjected to his power, no one can resist his will.* Esth. 13. 9. The result of which, dear people, is that necessity compels us to submit to the choice of heaven. For, on whichever side we turn ourselves, it is certain that God's commands will ever be accomplished, and that we must obey his injunctions, either willingly or with reluctance. If we join in with them readily, we comply with our duty, in doing what we ought. If we resist them, says St. Augustine, our very resistance fulfils his orders.

This maxim established, may I not safely call it a proof of good sense to acquiesce in the designs of Providence? For, let man do what he will, God is his master. Let him repine, let him fret, let him vent his passion, as he pleases, the resolves of heaven shall be completed in spite of all his efforts. St. Chrysostom compares such, as murmur at the commands of the Deity, to the waves of the boisterous sea. We often behold, he says, that impetuous element raising itself against heaven, but always unsuccessfully. It is obliged to stop at its awful voice; it must obey. *Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further.* Job xxxviii. 11.

And surely, Christians, if even insensible creatures confess the dominion and obey faithfully the commands of the universal Creator; if the sun remains immovable in the place first assigned to it; if the planets never deviate from the track pointed out to them; shall man

alone rebel against his Sovereign and Maker? Shall the sole use, he makes of his reason, be to distinguish himself by his disobedience? Let us ever keep in mind, my brethren, that this glorious character has been given us only to do homage to the Lord, our God; to render our services more worthy of him, and our submission more meritorious; to adore that supreme intelligence which governs us, and directs all nature.

Thus dear friends, to revolt against the orders of the divine superintendence; to make no other use of the light of reason, than to censure its conduct and oppose its decrees, is to abuse God's gifts; it is to turn his blessing upon himself; it is to be wanting in the most essential duty of the creature to its Creator. For know that it is the privilege of God alone to have a will of his own, says St. Anselm; because he alone is self-existent and independent. But for us limited and helpless beings, the only use we can pretend to make of our will, is to submit it to that of heaven.

Yes, my God! I here confess that whatever I have is thine, and thou canst dispose of it as thou pleasest. I fear neither indigence, nor affliction. All I dread is to disobey thy ordinances. Every state of life will please me, if thy hand does but place me in it. Nature, doubtless, will be uneasy, and break forth, in defiance of me, into murmurs and complaints; but I disclaim them beforehand. I only ask of thee, my God! that *thy will may be done, and not mine.* Luke xxii. 42.; for I know that such were the sentiments, by which thy Saints of both the Old and new Testament were actuated.

It was this spirit of submission that supported Jacob in his exile; Joseph in his fetters, and Moses, amidst the clamours of a seditious and rebellious people. It was this that prevailed on David to relinquish his throne at the first insinuation from the Lord; that rendered Job a model of the most heroic patience, under the severest trials. Animated with this spirit, the Apostles and the primitive believers remained firm, and inviolably attached to God in dangers, in prisons, in all the vicissitudes of fortune. In every event they confessed the finger of the Deity; taking occasion from adversity, as well as from prosperity, to glorify and honour him. A disposition, which is at once reasonable, necessary, and founded on the sovereign dominion of the Lord and our entire dependence on him; and a disposition, I moreover add, of the utmost utility in our present state; since this alone can secure to us tranquillity and peace amidst the evils, that surround us.

Would you know then, Christians, the advantages, that attend the resignation of ourselves to Providence? It is to exonerate our minds of that weight of solicitude for our interests, which usually oppresses them: it is to get rid of those anxious inquietudes, that follow upon the heels of human prudence: it is to forget ourselves entirely, in order to depend wholly on the wisdom, the goodness and the power of a God. The man, who thus unloads himself, as I may say, of his own conduct, reaches the goal of happiness without any difficulty,

difficulty, and may confidently sing with David: I am under the protection of the Lord, what shall I be afraid of? I am poor indeed and destitute; but the Lord governs me; he himself undertakes to supply my wants, and nothing, except sin, can befall me, without his express command. What a fund of comfort do I not find in the conduct of this heavenly Providence with regard to its servants? How sweetly does the Deity dispose every thing for his glory and my salvation! For *to them, that love God*, and are submissive to his orders, *all things work together for their good* and real welfare. Rom. viii. 28.

Hence it is evident that the most sure method of becoming happy is to submit. God is power itself; *he does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth*. Ps. ciii. Our inclinations are in his hands, and he models them as he likes; and the means we sometimes dare to use against him, are frequently the instruments he employs, whereby to effect his eternal purposes.

Thus the brothers of Joseph contributed to his elevation, by the very means which they made use of for his ruin. Thus Amon was caught in the snares, that he had intended for Mardochee. Thus Saul, in persecuting David, whom the Lord had destined for his successor, lost his crown, and was compelled to leave it to the person, who, of all mankind, was the most odious to him. Thus the perfidy of Judas, the jealousy of the Pharisees, the ungrateful cruelty of the Jews conspired to the grand work of our redemption, and to the accomplishment of those mysteries, that had remained in darkness from the date of time. Thus the wicked, in spite of themselves, enter daily into the views of heaven. For they serve, says St. Augustine, to exercise the virtues of the just, and to give them an opportunity of meriting that wreath of glory, which the hand of God has prepared for them.

Neither is this all, my friends. Peace and tranquillity are the happy consequences of this obedience to the decrees of Providence. Neither sufferings, contradictions, nor any thing of the kind can shake the submissive Christian, who reposes entirely on the guidance of his Maker. Does some unforeseen accident reduce him to a state of indigence? He cries out with holy Job; *the Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done; blessed be his name*. Job i. 21. Does an enemy take advantage of his disgrace to insult, and load him with the blackest calumnies? He imitates the meekness of David, in regard to Semei, saying with him; *let him alone, that he may curse, as the Lord hath bidden him: perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction, and may render me good for the cursing of this day*. 2 Kings xvi. 11.

Immortal thanks, he exclaims, be given to this all-wise Providence, for having humbled and afflicted me; because I am thereby reduced to a situation, that affords me a sure and easy opportunity of effecting my salvation; a situation, in which I am blessed with the possession of true peace, and in which I find such powerful motives

to be sober, humble and penitent; to detach myself from inconstant and perishable creatures, and to unite myself to thee, my Sovereign good! who neither wilt nor canst forsake me. Such, my dear people, are the solid principles, by which both you and I should endeavour to be actuated: principles, that should engage us to adore the designs of Providence on all occasions; even on those in which it looks the most unfavourably upon us. Never therefore, I beseech you, lose sight of the two great objects, which I have on this occasion held up to your view: first, that we ought to place our whole confidence in Providence: secondly, that we are bound implicitly to resign ourselves to its direction.

Yes, O God I convinced of the truth of these important lessons, we resolve to pay a proper attention to them in future. We will henceforth submit to whatever it shall please thee to ordain. Without neglecting the means, which thou permittest us to use for the success of our lawful projects, we still trust wholly and quietly for the event of every thing to thee. Let us all, my brethren, return thanks to this amiable Providence, which we have all experienced. Let us bless it equally in prosperity and adversity: in prosperity, by receiving the good things, it sends us, with acknowledgment and gratitude: in adversity, by supporting the evils of life with resignation and patience. Let it be our constant prayer that the will of God may ever be done in us, and accomplished both on earth and in heaven: on earth by our sanctification; and in heaven by our establishment in the possession of endless happiness. Amen.

T H E

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST.

On the REMEMBRANCE of DEATH.

Behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother.
Luke vii. 12.

THE son of this afflicted widow, whom Christ, by an effect of his power, restores to her pious arms, is an admonition he gives us, that being formed of dust, also the day will come, when like him, we must return to our parent earth. *It is appointed for all men once to die.* Heb. ix. 27.

But, if there be nothing more certain than that we must die; so neither is there any thing more uncertain than the time when, the place where, the manner how.

Is it not astonishing then, Christians, that, convinced of these two points, we should reflect on them so little; and that the greater part of mankind should be so frequently surprized by the approach of this last moment? If the Lord, says St. Hilarius, conceals from us the knowledge of the day of our death, it is with a view to remove that pernicious security which this knowledge would create; and that, being alarmed by this continual incertitude, we may be solicitous to prepare ourselves, and anticipate, by a strict vigilance, an event, the effect of which is as sure, as the time of it is uncertain. Let us frequently, my dear friends, let us attentively ponder these truths, on which our eternity depends. Let us often think of death; the recollection of which, says the scripture, is our most sure preservative

servative against sin. That we must die is indubitable. To die well is what you hope for : to be prepared for it is what you neglect. But the latter, nevertheless, is the natural consequence, you should draw from the certainty of death and from the hopes you entertain. Now, this preparation consists in two things. First, in having the remembrance of death ever present to our eyes. Secondly, in regulating the whole tenour of our conduct by it. Such is the division I propose to make of this important subject ; after a petition, as usual, to the source of divine information.

It is not without reason the Church reminds us, at the commencement of Lent, of our mean extraction and frail mortality. But it is incomprehensible, dear people, that the generality of you, blind to your true interests, should lose one of the most efficacious of all means to ensure your salvation, by disregarding her advice. Whence the cause then of the misconduct of most people on this essential article ? First, they reject the thoughts of death, as disagreeable ; for which reason they endeavour to keep every idea of it at a distance. Secondly, as they are ignorant of the utility of this remembrance, they imagine it will be enough to think of death when it calls upon them. Thirdly, they look upon it as impracticable, to turn this reflection to any profit amidst the variety of cares that constantly engross them. Let us try to reform and rectify these errors.

And first, brethren, I agree with you, that the notion of death is the parent of anxiety. I own that this idea, in some degree, disquiets almost every one ; and makes deep impressions, not only on sinners, rivetted to the goods of the earth ; but even on those virtuous souls, whom faith has already weaned from these sublunary things. I do not undertake then to cure you of all fears upon this article. For, besides that, I cannot suppose it would be an easy matter so to do, I am persuaded this apprehension may contribute to your welfare.

To be satisfied of this, it suffices for your to know, that the fear of death is incident to all men, in proportion as they more or less love the life, of which it deprives them. The very Saints feel it. Nay, Jesus Christ himself, our sovereign model, is struck with this apprehension. To teach such, as are agitated by it, that it is not criminal in itself ; but that it may be available to the work of salvation. Wherefore, Christians, viewing death in this light, so far from rejecting the idea of it as disagreeable ; we should cherish it, and manage it with prudence, on account of the advantages with which it may be attended.

For, dear people, *dust you are, and into dust you must return*. Reject the thoughts of death if you please ; remove them from you as far as possible, still you cannot hinder it from coming, nor retard its approach. Like passengers in a ship, who are perpetually carried on by its progressive motion, however insensible of it they may be, we advance towards our end without intermission. Time, which passes equally in sleep as in work, bears us imperceptibly towards
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our grave ; and, whether we reflect upon it or not, we arrive at our final term. In vain therefore do we endeavour to suppress the remembrance of death, when the stroke of it is inevitable.

Nevertheless, my friends, remark that death, altogether unavoidable and imperious, as it is, neither does, nor can extend its power over the whole man. One half of him must die ; but the other is immortal. To see the care you take of the two different parts, of which you are composed, one would imagine the soul was to perish and not the body. Ah ! my brethren, open your eyes to such a gross deception. The body must die, in spite of all your solicitude ; and the soul, which by your sins you have so often murdered and assassinated ; this soul, disfigured by your crimes, is destined by its maker to live for ever : may he grant it a state of happiness, and that you prove not such enemies to it, as to make it miserable for eternity. Be not then so ingenious to your own destruction. To what purpose to shut your eyes to the thoughts of death, when it must inevitably overtake you ?

But in rejecting this idea, you say, I avoid a mortification, that breaks in upon my rest. To this I answer first, that we cannot remove it so effectually but it will occur, and, in spite of us, imbitter our pleasures. Do we not daily almost see or hear of the death of some acquaintance ? Recollect how many have been cut off in the space of the last twelve months, and how many may follow in the course of twelve months more. Secondly, if you look at your dissolution with the eye of faith, you will find a thousand advantages in the uneasiness, it gives you. For as this uneasiness, proceeds from the fear of death ; and as death is natural in its principle ; every time a Christian, struck with this apprehension, accepts of death in submission to the orders of God, he dies, as we may say ; and thus multiplies the sacrifice of his life, which he can only make once. Thirdly, after all, we become habituated to the thoughts of death, and its horrors wear away. Provided only we view it in a Christian light ; and that we never look at it, without casting our eyes at the same time on that eternal life, which succeeds it. By which means, the dread that troubled us, being qualified by the hopes that support us, we shall find no more of this apprehension, than what is requisite to keep us in that state of watchfulness, which our Saviour enjoins us so strictly.

Be not deceived, my friends ; for on this important matter, we can be deceived no more than once. It is not a time to think of death, when we have but an instant to live. How much is it to be feared that the person, who, in the time of health, shall have neglected the precautions requisite to enable him to die well, will expire in very different dispositions ? In fact, how to become equal on a sudden to an emergency, that was at all times fraught with difficulty, and in regard to which we never gave ourselves any concern ? But the oracle of God, which is clear on this head ;
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the divine justice, of which we every day see or hear so many formidable instances; and our own experience are so many convictions, that, without an extraordinary interposition of heaven, he who shall have perpetually delayed to prepare himself for death, will not die in the dispositions requisite to be saved; and, of consequence, that it is the height of folly to postpone the care of thinking of death, until it comes with all its terrors.

And whence proceeds your error, brethren? Because perhaps you imagine that it is an easy thing to die in the dispositions of the just, and that a good death is the work of no more than a few moments. But be not so imposed upon. What! do you think it dying well of course to expire after making a general confession, and receiving the rights of the Church? Was this all, how many might flatter themselves with the hopes of a happy death? But alas! how many are now burning, and shall burn for eternity in hell, who have had all these helps? Appearances may be in their favour; but appearances are not sufficient. What then is it to die well? I will tell you, dear people, briefly. It is to die clear of sin, and all attachment to it. It is to die, after having effaced, by a painful and bitter repentance, all the sins of our youth, all the irregularities of our lives. It is to die, filled with a lively faith, an invincible hope, a love of God, that surpasses every other affection, and a charity towards our neighbour, that equals the love, we bear to ourselves. Now, is all this, I ask, the work of an instant? Or will it be time enough to think of death, when it shall stare us in the face? No, a Christian never should drop this thought. Death should be always present to him; and that oracle of St. Paul, *I die daily*, 1 Cor. xv. 31, should be his motto.

But how can we possibly have this remembrance ever in our mind, amidst the hurry of our state of life? We must relinquish every thing, and hide ourselves in a desert, to look at nothing but our coffins. I will not dissemble, Christians; I confess they are the happiest, who, wholly occupied with the thoughts of death, give all their time, of consequence, to the care of their salvation. Nor is it less true that, in defiance of business, we may make a solitude for ourselves, in our interior; where sometimes we may find leisure to reflect on our last end,

Besides, dear friends, to think of death is nothing very difficult. Whichever way we turn our eye, it presents itself. Our frequent prayers for our departed brethren; the burials, that so often meet our sight; the piles of bones the Church-yard exhibits; the graves, over which we walk, are not these so many objects, that should remind us of our mortality?

Do you desire then to learn the art of uniting the thoughts of death with the various functions of your state? Recollect what I have already said; that a Christian, in this life, is like a person in a ship. The vessel being compelled to lay to, the passenger
makes

makes use of the opportunity to go on shore ; he does not stray far ; and for fear of being left behind, keeps a sharp look out, lest perhaps they give him the slip and sail without him. It is in this manner, brethren, that we should act. Our life is but a passage ; our destination the port of happiness. Many articles fill up our time, during the voyage ; and it would assuredly be wrong to sit down idly and do nothing. But we must remember that God is the pilot, who can stop us when he pleases. We must from time to time cast our eyes upon the ship ; i. e. in the midst of our occupations, we must be mindful of our last end. This, I hope, Christians, may be sufficient to convince you that there is nothing easier, nor more advantageous than to think of death. It remains now to shew how this idea should be applied to the regulation of our lives.

In vain, dear people, to have the remembrance of death ever present, unless you give it a proper influence on your conduct. Nor could I but deem you truly miserable, if, neglecting to think of futurity, you had perpetually before you a dismal reflection, whose only tendency should be to fill you with anxiety. What measures are to be taken then to preclude all risk ? First, you must do that, during life, which perhaps you may not have it in your power to do at death. Secondly, you must perform that now, which both necessity and your own wishes will suggest at that awful period. Here is at once matter for your instruction, for your dread and for your comfort, Christians.

In the first place then, the grand secret of dying well is to do in the time of life what, perchance, we may be incapacitated to do at the hour of death. And this is so much the more necessary, as the first thing, that will occur, when we perceive we are about to die, will be the retrospect of our conduct. We shall then see all our faults ; but we shall see them with very different eyes from those, we behold them with at present. Then every thing will appear in its proper colours. Many objects will strike us then, which now we hardly deign to bestow a thought upon ; those falsehoods, on which we never reflected ; that liberty of giving vent to passion, in which we indulged ourselves ; those illicit pleasures, we endeavoured to pass for innocent ; those unfair dealings, whereby we enriched ourselves ; and a thousand other sins, on the score of which we were so long hoodwinked.

Wherefore, brethren, to sweeten the bitterness of death, do at present what possibly you may be incapable of doing then. Put your conscience into order, that it may not reproach you at that trying juncture. Make it your rule, if not every day, at least every week, to run over all the thoughts, all the words, all the actions of your life. Like the holy Ezechias, recollect the various sins, you may have committed in each period of your age, especially in that of your youth. Entreat God to give you a true compunction for them. Say to him with the feelings of the Publican, *O God be merciful*

merciful to me a sinner. Luke xviii. 13. Go then, and be washed in the restoring waters of penance; and endeavour by the sincerity of your repentance, to reinstate yourselves in that happy state, in which you were, when regenerated in the font of baptism.

Thus reconciled to your sovereign good, you may say with St. Peter; *now I know the Lord hath sent his angel, and delivered me out of the band of Satan.* Acts xii. 11. My only business now is to make use of the time, he is pleased to afford me. Let us therefore, strive my soul! to die like the Saints, although we have lived like sinners: let us receive death from the hands of our Creator, with as much joy, as we received the good things of life. Yes, my God! had I a thousand lives to offer, I would gladly sacrifice them to thee. I submit with all my heart to be bereaved of whatever is dear to me on earth. I submit to the hideous condition, to which my body must be reduced: and as to the pangs, I must then endure, they will only be too light and momentary; since they are the last pledges I can give of my love and wish to please thee. I accept even of those, that are to follow. Glorify thyself, O Lord! in punishing me, as I have so grievously dishonoured thee. But however criminal I may be, thou hast rescued me from hell. I shall therefore see thee, I shall love thee, I shall enjoy thee eternally. Such is the first step towards a good death. Let us try to take a second, by doing that now, which we must of necessity do then.

St. Ambrose, explaining those words of the Apocalypse, *blessed are the dead, that die in the Lord*, Apoc. xiv. 13. asks if the dead can die again. He elucidates this difficulty by replying that they are already *dead*, whose heart is disengaged from the world; and that those persons *die truly in the Lord*, who have no tie to the earth. Yes, Christians; to die without pain, study to detach yourselves, by degrees, from such things, as you affect the most. Thus you will anticipate death, and learn to give up willingly whatever it must inevitably separate you from.

But you will ask me, perhaps, how this disengagement is to be acquired. I answer with the great St. Gregory, that he, who thinks seriously of his dissolution, can have no difficulty to despise the fading pleasures of the world. Think of death, brethren; and this wholesome thought will soon detach you from all, that death itself must ere long deprive you of. Think of death; and you will see that the things, which make life so desirable, must shortly disappear for ever in your regard. Think of death; and you will acknowledge with St. Ambrose, that the concerns of life, which are so fleeting, are undeserving of your care.

These motives, Christians, did you weigh them with attention, would amply suffice to inspire that disengagement, which is the best preparation to an easy and quiet death. But if you want to know the means of acquiring it more fully; retrench all superfluities; frequently offer to God whatever you love most, and beseech
him

him to dispose of it according to his holy will ; assure him that you are in readiness to give up every thing for his sake. In a word, whenever he may judge proper to afflict you with any sufferings, sickness and the like, submit patiently to his orders ; and, besides performing whatever you must do necessarily at your departure, endeavour also to do that, which in those critical moments you would be glad to have accomplished.

One of the things, dear people, that will give us the greatest concern at death, will be to see the abuse of our invaluable time ; and this we shall regret the more as we shall then be fully conscious that it would have been very easy for us to have laid up treasures for futurity. Then we shall perceive the sense of those words, which the rich man addresses to his faithless steward ; the time is over, thou canst *be steward no longer*. Luke xvi. 2. Who, but those who have experienced it, can comprehend the dismal situation of the dying person, who can produce nothing meritorious for the life he is about to enter on ?

To prevent such a heart-felt regret, my friends, let us undertake now, what then we shall so ardently, but so vainly wish to have completed. Have you not yet made choice of a state of life ? Choose such a one, as may be no impediment to your salvation. Are you already engaged ? Be solicitous to discharge the duties of your calling, and remember that you will never do so many good works during your life, as, at the hour of your departure, you will wish to have performed. Say to yourselves at the beginning of each day : what should I be glad to have done, if God was to call upon me this night ? Let this salutary reflection accompany all your actions, and strive to perform each of them with that fervour, as if it was to be your last. *Blessed is that servant, whom when the Lord shall come, he shall find so doing*. Matt. xxiv. 46.

Happy then the Christian, whom death shall find thus prepared. How abundantly will the peace and comfort, he shall then experience, requite all his cares ? What encomiums will he receive from his Divine Master ? What treasures, as the reward of his victory ? *Amen I say to you, he shall set him over all his goods*. Ib. 47.

Happy again, and eternally happy the Christian, who, often reflecting on his last end, squares his conduct by this remembrance, and empowers himself to behold the approach of death without anxiety ; to meet it affectionately, and less as a punishment, than as a passage to immortal happiness. Ah ! how comfortable, in the terror of those alarming moments, to be secure from the agitations of a disordered conscience ! Think then of death, dear people, and represent to yourselves the horrors, that will offer to your minds at that decisive period. First, the situation, you will then be in, shall discover the errors, you so long laboured under. Secondly, the irregularities of your past conduct shall crowd in upon you, to make you feel more sensibly the just motives of your present fear. Thirdly, your future, but impending doom, will

will open to you a prospect of eternity, and the punishments that await you. Again then, Christians, think of death. Endeavour to prevent that deplorable surprise, which is never to be retrieved. Let us die to ourselves, by the recollection of death at present, that we may not die eternally hereafter : and let us learn to live as the children of God, the elect of Jesus Christ, destined through his merits, to live for ages without end. Amen.

T H E

T H E
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY
After P E N T E C O S T,

On the Observance of Sundays and Holidays. —

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day ? Luke xiv. 3.

STRANGE and extraordinary as this question may appear, it is not without a just cause, however, that our Saviour here proposes it to the decision of the Jewish Elders. For we read that they observed the Sabbath in a style so illiberal, as to refrain from the duties of charity, because they law forbade all servile work ; whilst, at the same time, they made no scruple to spend it in amusements and the suggestions of pleasure. A false interpretation, exclaims St. Chrysostom ; for by the establishment of the Sabbath, what did God require of them but to abstain from doing evil ?

Alas ! Christians, if St. Chrysostom bewails so justly the non-observance of the Sabbath, have we less reason to lament the violation of the Sunday ; a day consecrated to God, as that was ; and on which we are prohibited at present, as well as the Jews were of old, to do any servile work ; and are commanded to attend diligently to the worship of our Maker ?

To employ the Sundays as we ought, (and the same, I say, of Holidays) we should spend them in avoiding evil, and in the practice of good works. It is true there is not the moment, in which it can be lawful to commit sin ; or on which the practice of virtue is

not more or less incumbent. But it is equally true, that there are times, on which it is expected of us strictly both to shun the one with more solicitude, and to perform the other with a redoubled fervour.

But who, my brethren, could believe, unless convinced of it by experience, that Christians, as gross and as carnal as the Jews, should think they satisfied this precept by a mere abstinence from manual labour; and that, for the rest, they were at liberty, to devote these days to idleness? This, no doubt, is the cause of that reflection of St. Chrysostom, respecting the Jewish Sabbath; and of serious people, ~~now-a-days~~, concerning the Christian Sunday; viz. that this day, which was appointed to cleanse the soul from her impurities, was chiefly remarkable for the addition of fresh crimes.

Do you desire then, friends, to spend the Sundays and Holidays in a proper manner? Abstain from servile work; and apply to the concerns of heaven. For, if I allow that the sanctification of these days, in part, consists in the cessation from actual labour: it is proper you should know also that it has no less a dependence on the performance of the works of piety. To handle so important a matter with a prospect of success, I propose to shew you, in the first place, that Sundays, &c. are destined to the ease of man; and in the second, that they are devoted to the service of the Deity; the direction of whose sacred spirit we will here previously implore.

Exhausted with fatigue and labour, man stands in need of rest: and on no other title can he possibly have any pretensions to it. *In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread*, is the common, general doom of the children of Adam. And this the Almighty explains in the following clear manner: *six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy works; and the seventh is the day of the Sabbath, that is, of the rest of the Lord, thy God.* Deut. v. 13. Hence then let us examine in what this cessation from work consists; and what is the nature of that rest, which is recommended on these occasions.

In the first place then I say, dear people, that all unnecessary employments must be dropped on such days, as are devoted to God. The reason of which is this. It is the part of every Christian, says St. Paul, to perform all his actions in the name of Jesus Christ; and it would be difficult in the extreme to keep our minds fixed on heaven amidst the distractions of the world. For the hurry of business, to which man is exposed, must unavoidable draw his attention to inferior and foreign objects. It was expedient therefore and necessary that particular days should be assigned, on which the discharge of spiritual duties should be our only occupation: on which, separated from creatures, we might give ourselves to God: and on which, shutting our ears to the clamours of a noisy, importunate world, we might listen to our Creator in silence and retirement. Admirable invention and contrivance of divine love! which, by this suspension and interruption of labour, reminds us of the happy state previous to
sin,

sin, in which man's only business was to glorify his Maker: a desirable foretaste of the felicity of heaven, where we shall be wholly taken up in singing praises to our God.

It may not be superfluous, Christians, to inform you of the difference, introduced by the law of grace, in the regulation of this precept. The law of Moses, a law of rigour, forbade all servile employments on the days dedicated to God; and this with such a strictness, that the Lord himself condemned a man to death for gathering wood upon the Sabbath day. And the evangelical law, a law of love, which solicits the heart more than the hand, is not behindhand in prohibiting them. However, it is much more indulgent and favourable to our wants. For by servile works it understands those only, whose particular end is gain. Whence it follows, first, that such works, as are directed to the service of religion, are not meant to be comprised within the limits of this restriction. Secondly, that the actions, which the preservation of our own or neighbour's life, or the public welfare of the state may require at our hands, are not upon this list. Thirdly, that the labours and occupations of the mind, provided they be not bad either in themselves or in their tendency, nor in any shape influenced by mercenary views, are lawful and permitted. Fourthly, that such works, as are needful to obviate any general calamity, are not illicit in their way. Because, although they may suppose a temporary profit; yet, as this is not the end at which they are principally levelled, they are not to be accounted servile.

But, my friends, what, alas! is the consequence of this benevolent indulgence? That the generality conclude they have sanctified the Sunday, because they have not been busied with their usual occupations. However, be not deluded, says St. Augustine: You would do wrong on such days to cultivate your lands: but you would do worse to go into company, and get intoxicated with liquor. How many, nevertheless, do we see, who, though not to be induced to put their hand to any work, yet spend the Sunday in drinking, to the subversion of their morals? Is not the reproach, which St. Augustine makes to the Jews, equally applicable to such Christians? Do not the latter pass the Sunday, as the former did the Sabbath, in the pursuits of criminal luxury? In fact, are not these the fatal days, that fill the resorts of idleness? May I not say more? Is a scheme of mischief to be agitated; an assignation to be given; the most shameful crimes committed? Is not Sunday the day usually pitched on and selected for these purposes? As if done intentionally to sin with greater scandal, and insult the Supreme Being in a more public and notorious manner.

However, there are many, I confess, who are not so irreligious as to profane these sacred times with either labour or debauchery. But the greater part fall into another error, which if not so culpable in itself, is no less hurtful to religion. The obligation of hearing

Mafs they yallow to be effential. But, this once complied with, their confcience is at ease, and they fuppose they may fpend the reft of the day, as idlenefs may chance to dictate. No, dear people, no; this is not the refofe intended by the institution of the Sunday: a flothful inactivity, which a Chriftian fhould be afhamed of. What God and his Church inculcate is a ceffation from our temporal concerns, that we may attend to thofe of eternity. "Do not imagine, fays St. Auguftine, you are forbid to labour on the Sunday, that you may have time for idle talk. This relaxation is only granted with a view to afford you leifure to fing the praises of the Lord." Give not then, as St. Paul exhorts you, Chriftians, give not room to be cenfured for the bad employment of our folemnities; to be taxed with fpending them, I do not now fay, in intemperance or lewdnefs, but in floth or idle paffimes. For this, St. Auguftine continues, would be to celebrate our feftivals, as the Jews did their Sabbath; who, while they abftained from working, indulged themfelves in an indolence, no lefs criminal than ridiculous.

Ariſe then from this languor, brethren; or it will lead you to the gates of death. Take advantage of theſe ſacred days, which God has devoted to his glory, that you may turn them to your falvation. If you know how to profit by them, they are truly that *favourable time*, St. Paul ſpeaks of to the Corinthians. For obſerve that, in addition to the general graces, each myſtery, we commemorate, conveys its particular bleſſing. Here Chriſt is born within us, on the very night we celebrate his birth of the humble Virgin in the ſtable. There he conducts you to his knowledge, by the light of that novel ſtar, which leads the Sages to his cradle. Now he communicates the merits of his paſſion to you. Next, he produces in you the glorious fruit of his reſurrection. If he raiſes your hopes to heaven, by aſcending thither himſelf; in the ſpace of ten days, he ſends his Holy Spirit, and ſets your hearts on fire with the flames of his ſacred charity.

What ineffimable favours, Chriftians! But God, ever liberal towards thoſe, that ſerve him with fidelity, does not confine his bounty here. Every Saint, whoſe feaſt you keep with a juſt and due reſpect, obtains a new grace for you; the martyr his courage; the confefſor his faith, and the virgin her chaſtity. Happy then the perſons, who ſtrive to profit by theſe occaſions. Unhappy they, that let them ſlip without turning them to their benefit. The time will arrive, when, like the ſlothful Eſau, they will come to crave an anticipated bleſſing. And what answer ſhall be given to them? Why did you not haſten to receive my benediction? *I have already bleſſed your brother, and he ſhall be bleſſed for evermore.* Gen. xxvii. 33. Such brethren, will be our lot, if we reſuſe to accept the offers, that are made us on theſe ſacred days. Wherefore, having now ſeen that they are intended for the *eaſe* and

and repose of man, let me endeavour to convince you, in the next place, that they are appropriated to the service of God.

The principal reason why servile works are prohibited on the Lord's day is our sanctification and spiritual welfare. So that the precept, which enjoins them, regards much more the acts of piety to be adopted on such occasions, than the bare suspension of manual labour. But what then are these acts? This I have still to shew you, my friends, to engage you to spend them suitably.

To enter therefore into the views of the divine law in the above ordinance keep in sight this maxim: that the cessation from work is designed to forward us to that spiritual rest, which this commandment chiefly looks at. The repose of the mind, St. Augustine says, the tranquillity of the heart, the observances of religion, these are the points proposed and recommended on the Christian Sabbath.

And what again is the use too generally made of it? Instead of atoning for the sins of the week, may I not repeat with truth that such days are disgraced by the perpetration of the blackest crimes? Is there not then reason to apprehend lest the Deity should vent on us the indignation, he expressed against the Israelites? *My soul hateth*, he says to them, *your new moons and your solemnities: they are become troublesome: I am weary of hearing them.* *Is. i. 14.* As if he had said; you have converted my feasts into your own; and the days, that should have been dedicated to me and to my service, you have impiously devoted to yourselves and to your pleasures. For in what, on the same authority, did the religious worship of the Jews terminate? In a criminal inactivity; and while their bodies were at rest, their souls were tossed about by the contending waves of guilt. Hence they were devoured with animosity and hatred. They oppressed one another, in hopes of profiting by their injustice. The widow and the orphan became a prey to the rapacity of the great. And, what God resented in a far greater degree, immersed as they were in vice, they imagined they should calm his anger by that inaction and listlessness, to which, upon the Sabbath, they adhered with such a nicety. I am willing to believe, brethren, that no one present is so deluded, either by impiety or ignorance, as to suppose he shall find mercy, by resting on the Lord's day. But do you not persuade yourselves you have fulfilled its obligation by dropping your usual employments? Or, at least, do you not think that the observance of the Sunday consists merely in hearing Mass? and that the other works of piety, recommended to your practice on it, are not a matter of precept, but of advice only and counsel?

I am free however to confess, Christians, that the sole act of devotion, the Church has ordered for the Sunday, is to assist at the
great

great sacrifice. But one must be wholly unacquainted with her intentions in enjoining so much, to presume she requires no more; or to think we have fulfilled this precept by devoting a single hour to it. If the Church goes no further than to command you to hear Mass, she thereby plainly insinuates this is not the whole of your duty: and that to spend the remainder of the day in diversions and amusements is to violate and abuse it by a sacrilegious profanation.

But what, say you, are the exercises, we should principally attend to in the discharge of this obligation? We learn them from the Holy Fathers, and particularly St. Augustine, whom I have quoted here so frequently. He tells us that, on the Lord's day, the faithful were present not only, as we are, at the sacrifice of the altar, but that they made it their rule to assist at, and go through with the divine office. This pious custom had then taken such a root, as to pass for a primitive law during the course of several ages: and the same should be observed now-a-days, as far as circumstances will permit. To this you may add, my friends, that you should endeavour on the Sunday to cleanse your souls from the rust contracted in the week time: seek to be reconciled to God, and to your neighbour, if at variance: present to the Supreme Being the sacrifice of a contrite heart: regulate your interior: hear with an humble docility the instructions given by your pastor: carry home with you, if I may so express myself, the holy nourishment of God's word to be your food and support during the remainder of the week: recall to your remembrance the favours received from heaven, and strive to impress on your hearts an indelible sense of gratitude.

On the Sunday then, my dear friends, repair to the house of God, there to render to him your tribute of adoration and thanksgiving; to acknowledge him for your Creator, to bless him as your Redeemer, and to rejoice in him for having opened to you the grace of his Holy Spirit. What business more important can you have to transact? If the rest of the week be embittered by the drudgery of life, why not sweeten the Sunday with the pleasures of devotion? If you love this God of bounty, as he merits so abundantly, seek him in the abode, which he has chosen for his own. Join with your fellow-members in the assemblies he has formed. And, if once you be so happy as to *taste how sweet he is*, you will think yourselves highly favoured in the opportunity, which is offered you.

But here I must beg leave, Christians, to be indulged in a short digression; and may it help to discountenance an error, which is now-a-days but too prevalent. As some people, I know not why, seem to suppose they have discharged their duty by their attendance in the morning, it is not unusual to see our chapels almost deserted in the afternoon. But if such persons will reflect, what most
they

they themselves think of it? In what will they spend the rest of the day, to *keep it holily*, as they are commanded? Will they go and lose such advantages in a circle of dissipation? After having sung in the morning the canticles of Sion, will they abandon themselves in the afternoon to the diversions of Babylon? Is not this to expose our festivals to derision and contempt?

But to turn away our eyes from such scandalous profanations, I will resume my discourse, and suggest some further measures to spend the Sunday properly. The example of Jesus Christ may suffice for our direction. We find this divine Saviour employed upon the Sabbath in healing the sick, delivering the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted. And the scandal taken at it shews the grossness of his enemies, and that they were utterly blind to the secrets of God's wisdom. Christians! let not the conduct of Jews mislead you in this respect. But observe what I now say, that, if any thing can sanctify and make our festivals acceptable, it is the performance of the works of charity. To relieve the distressed, to visit the sick, to edify and encourage them, how immediately adapted are these and the like means to satisfy our obligation of *keeping holy* the Christian Sabbath! For remark this point attentively, brethren; so great a share have the works of charity in the sanctification of our feasts, that, on the most solemn of them all, were the necessities of your neighbour to detain you from the public service, the practice of mercy at home would supply the place of sacrifice. Serious and important truths, my friends, which I conjure you in the name of Christ to engrave deeply on your hearts.

To conclude then, dear people, learn that, as the Sundays and Holidays are designed to give us leisure for the service of our Maker, so they likewise are meant as a time of relaxation: and that, if we refuse to make use of the indulgence they afford, *God swears in his wrath we shall not enter into his rest*. The favours of the Deity, on the days consecrated to him; the great advantages to be reaped by a diligent observance of them; every consideration, in short, prompts, us to say with David; *turn, my soul, into thy rest, for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee*. Ps. cxiv. 7. If during the course of the week, you have lived for yourselves: if, your time has been taken up with the culture of your lands, with the attendance of your shops, with the avocations of your calling; at least, Christians, dedicate the Sundays to him. All times and all days, as David says, are his. But the Sundays he reserves particularly to himself. Do not therefore rob him of a moment of that day, which he has chosen for his own. Give it all to his worship, for which he has marked it out. He commands it, and his commandment is peremptory. Religion exacts it, and she supports her injunction with the authority of the legislature.

And

And shall we have the insolence to bid defiance to them all? No, dear friends, I cannot think it. I hope too well of your piety to harbour the suspicion. Your interest, take notice, is here every way concerned: since from the temporal rest required of you by the observance of this precept, you will be translated to the repose of eternity in the enjoyment of your Sovereign good. Amen.

T H E

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY

After PENTECOST.

On the PRACTICE of GOOD WORKS,

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?
Matt. xxii. 36.

NOTHING can shew more clearly the depravity of human nature, than our impatience, as I may call it, when corrupted ourselves, of outdoing others. Such is the case of the Pharisees. Thinking themselves more knowing than the Sadducees, whom Christ had silenced, they hold a meeting to concert the measures the most likely to ensnare them. With this view, they depute one of their body to propose this question to him, *which is the greatest commandment?* A matter, the merest novice in the institution of the divine law could not possibly have a doubt of.

But, my friends, while we censure the Jews, and profess our faith in Christ, is it not astonishing we should lead lives so inconsistent with our belief, and so devoid of the works of piety, which he every where inculcates? Did we but reflect, what further encouragement could we desire on this head, than the greatness of the rewards promised to the doers of good works? However little we may pique ourselves on our sensibility and gratitude, ought not interest at least to make us diligent in the performance of religious acts; when we know that, by doing them, we may pile up treasures for eternity?

This

This subject of good works therefore is what I here mean to speak upon: to shew the obligation and necessity of doing them, and the manner how to render them available to salvation. And, in order to this, I will limit what I have to say to the two following propositions: first, we must do good works: secondly, we must do them properly. On the one hand, you will see the motives, which evince their necessity. And on the other, the conditions, that should essentially attend them. Author of grace, and the source of all our good, infuse into our souls thy heavenly direction, through the merits of our Saviour.

The Royal Prophet seems to have traced the whole of our duty in this regard in a brief and concise manner. Be careful, he says, to do no harm; *decline from evil*. Or if you have already been so unfortunate, to make amends for it, *do good*. Ps. xxxvi. 37. To avoid evil then is not sufficient. We must also do good, if we desire to comply with the obligations of our calling. For there are three points to be considered in the character of a Christian; first, the end and design, for which he was created; secondly, the recompense assured him, if he does but live up to it; and thirdly, the punishment, he is threatened with, in case of deviation.

To convince you therefore, brethren, of the necessity of good works, I first recur to the intention of the Deity in making you. Permit me here to put a question to you, which you were instructed in from your infancy. Why did God create you? Will any one reply it was to eat and drink, to amuse and divert himself? If so, to what purpose our rational soul, our understanding, our will? No, you were not made for ends so base, so ignoble, so vile as these; but to serve your God in this life, and to enjoy him in the next.

And what shall we infer from this? But that all the deliberate actions, which are directed to this end, are laudable and praiseworthy; and, on the other side, that such, as are in no degree referred to it, are defective and vitious. For instance, you work to gain your bread, and support yourselves and families. If this be your aim only, the very savages do as much. But if you work to please your Maker, and serve him in the department his adorable hand has placed you in, your labours will be acceptable and highly meritorious; because agreeable to that end, for which he sent you into the world.

And the following consideration makes still further to your advantage; viz. that, to do good, it is not requisite to be employed about those graver concerns of piety, which demand a close attention. You may convert all your actions, even those, that necessity or habit make familiar, into so many acts of virtue. So that every one may say with truth; I am contented with my condition; for, in regard to futurity, it is as convenient as any other; since it wholly depends on myself to render all my actions, however unimportant, acceptable to heaven.

But,

But, alas! my brethren, where shall we find the persons, that are studious to discharge a duty, so essential to salvation? Exteriorly busy, you do little that has any tendency to the end, for which you were made. For be assured that whatever is not directed to the glory of God, the chief purpose of our creation, is insignificant and useless. It was this made David say, *The Lord hath looked down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there be any that understand, and seek God.* Ps. xiii. 2. And what does he perceive? *That all are gone aside, and become unprofitable.* Because, although there be a few, that avoid the more enormous crimes, scarcely is there one, that truly *doeth good.* For, allowing that you do not blaspheme, that you do not get drunk, that you do not steal, what do you perform for heaven, and the interests of your Maker? I know you are always occupied. But it is for yourselves alone you work, without any thought or view to God. All your projects centre at home. You think of things no further, than as they regard your own well-being, or the establishment of your families.

Candidly, can you say, that this is the end, for which you received your being? Informed, as you are, you cannot; but must allow it to be no other than to love and serve the Deity; and that whatever else employs you, whether it be the spade, the desk, or the counter, they are all but so many means to accomplish that great end; and that you should neither indulge nor retrench them, but as they forward or obstruct your progress in the road to eternal bliss.

When I read in the Gospel that he, who gives a cup of water only to one, that is in want of it, shall be certainly rewarded; what then may I not expect, I say, from a multiplicity of other works, that are far more important? If I perform them for God's sake, he will repay me with himself; *i. e.* with the possession of an infinite and eternal happiness.

Nor fear, dear people, lest your hopes should prove vain and delusive. For remark, whenever the scriptures speak of that felicity, we aspire to, they give it such appellations only, as are calculated to shew the necessity and obligation of good works. First, they call it a reward: *Every man shall receive his reward, according to his labour.* 1 Cor. iii. 8. Secondly, a harvest: *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.* Gal. vi. 8. Thirdly, a crown: *He, that striveth, is not crowned, unless he strive lawfully.* 2 Tim. ii. 5. All expressions, which tend to inform us, that if we would be saved, we must work, we must sow, we must fight.

And what, my friends, so likely to stimulate us to labour, as the conviction of our interest? To reflect that every moment may be made worth a whole eternity? That every good action we perform will be rewarded with endless happiness? What more encouraging in the discharge of our various duties, than the assurance that our present diligence will be the measure of our future glory?

Shall

Shall it be said we do so much to advance and push our fortune, and make light of those concerns, that alone are worth our notice?

But, if we must *work*, to deserve the reward, we must likewise *sow*, to reap the harvest: even sow much, if we hope to be blessed with a plentiful crop. The seed, we scatter, must be proportioned to our wishes and expectations. For, says the Apostle, *He, who soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he, who soweth in blessings, shall reap of blessings also.* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

You are sensible, I make no doubt, my brethren, that to be entitled to *the reward and harvest*, it is requisite to *work and sow*. But, if you would make sure of *the crown of justice*, you must also *strive*, without intermission. *The kingdom of heaven*, says Christ, *suffereth violence; i. e.* it requires great exertions; and none, but them that use such exertions, may expect to obtain a seat in it: *the violent bear it away.* Matt. xi. 12. Every claim to eternal happiness was lost by the sin of Adam. Heaven is no longer an inheritance. It is become a conquest we must fight for. And this, no doubt, is what our Redeemer meant to insinuate by that formidable sentence; *Cast the unprofitable servant into exterior darkness.* Matt. xxv. 30. Where note, he does not say the adulterer, or the thief, but the *unprofitable servant*; who, though he does no great harm, yet performs nothing good either.

O ye Christian hearers! do you not think yourselves concerned in the award of this dreadful sentence? It is an incontestable truth, that we must fight and combat to gain the crown. In what conflicts have you hitherto been engaged? What temptations have you overcome? What victories have you obtained? Is it not true rather that you give way at the first appearance of an assault? Does the devil suggest a bad thought? you consent. Has any one a mind to draw you to the public-house? you yield without resistance. You grant to your passions all they crave: you deny your senses nothing. What prospect of your acquiring a crown then, which is only promised to the brave and active? But if the reward does not encourage you; at least dread the punishment reserved for them, that refuse, and neglect to do good works.

In fact, dear people, we have only to open the book of life to read their condemnation. *Every tree, that bringeth forth not good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire.* Matt. vii. 19. Where our Saviour does not say that the tree, which *bringeth forth evil fruit*, but the one, which *bringeth forth not good fruit shall be cut down, &c.* To give us to understand, that to be consigned to the flames of hell, it is sufficient to omit the acts, which religion recommends.

Good works, therefore, are obligatory on all. But they are more especially so on those, who, having sinned and offended God, are bound to satisfy his justice, and make atonement for their faults. Such was the opinion of St. Paul. *As you have made your members serve uncleanness unto iniquity; so now make them serve justice*

justice unto your sanctification. Rom. vi. 19. Who, nevertheless, takes this maxim for his rule of conduct? Which of you punishes his senses for the many crimes he has been guilty of through their influence and operation? But think of it as you please; it is an indisputable obligation for all such, as confess themselves sinners, to do as many good actions as they have committed bad ones. So far for the necessity of good works. Let us, in the next place, see the conditions, that are requisite to stamp a value on them.

Whatever fine appearance our works may wear outwardly, they cannot merit the name of good, unless they be vested with the conditions necessary to make them such in reality. But what are these conditions? First, the work must be good in itself. Secondly, the person, who does it, must be in a state of grace. And thirdly, the intention must be pure, and divested of human motives. Happy shall I be, if, in explaining these matters to you, brethren, I can engage you to do all your actions in a truly Christian spirit.

The first condition to make an action good, is to perform it in the order, which charity demands. This is the important rule, whereby to sanctify our works. And this same, I assert, is a point, in which we are extremely apt to deceive ourselves. In fact, how many do we see that are performing acts of charity, while they are wanting in those of justice? But this will never do, Christians. There must be an order in our good works: and the dues of justice must take place of the calls of supererogation.

You shall determine this matter yourselves by examples, that will render my meaning plain and obvious. What, for instance, is my duty in quality of your pastor? It is to labour with application in promoting your real welfare. Such is the work the Lord expects of me in my present situation. Was I to attempt the like elsewhere, from an unwarranted and busy zeal, and, in the mean time, abandon you, who are particularly committed to me, I should not do a good work; because I should neglect the principal task the Almighty has been pleased to lay upon me.

What are the obligations of a magistrate? Not to be praying all the day long, or visiting the hospitals: but to take up the cause of the oppressed; to employ his authority in checking vice, in preventing mischief; to hinder the opening of public-houses during the time of divine service, and of the shops on the Lord's day. This is his special charge, and which he cannot neglect to execute without deserving to be censured.

Who can doubt but that private devotions, and a diligent attendance at the sacred service, are among the best of works? Notwithstanding which, was a father, on their account, to omit the instruction of his children; or a mother to be constantly at church, instead of looking to the care of her family; it is certain that both these, and all in similar circumstances, would act an improper and wrong part.

I say more, dear people. There are many works of merit, that cease wholly to be such, when superior to their capacities, that undertake to accomplish them. To apply one's self to the conversion of sinners, to reform their morals, and instruct them in the rules of discipline, are, doubtless, acts of virtue. But when they do not fall within a person's province, they may often be unsuccessful, and even faulty. And this unquestionably, is the meaning of Solomon, when he warns us not to aim at things above our reach; and of St. Paul, when he tells us not to be wise to a too great degree.

Moreover, if the action itself must be good, so likewise must the person that does it; *i. e.* he must be in a state of grace. This disposition is so essential, that, without it, every action, however perfect otherwise, is void of honour, merit, or reward.

Void of honour, I say; and thus I explain myself. This action, howsoever good it may be supposed, not having the principle of life, which is sanctifying grace, will not be accepted by the Deity. For God does not so much regard the act, as the disposition of him, that performs it. This we see exemplified in the history of Cain and Abel. Why does God receive with complacency the oblations of the latter, while he scornfully rejects the sacrifices of the former? Because, replies St. Gregory, he considers less the gift, than the sentiments of the giver. The offerings of Abel did not render him acceptable. On the contrary, the Lord looked favourably on his presents only, because Abel himself was pleasing to him.

Secondly, I say that the best actions lose all their merit, when done in a state of sin. They are like wild plants, that from a want of being grafted, bear only a sour and distasteful fruit. But here, my friends, for fear you should mistake me, I must apprize you, that the works of piety may be considered in a double point of view. Such of them are morally good, as have a lawful and commendable end; although the person, that does them, be not in the habit of grace. But those, and those only, are justly deemed meritorious, which, besides the rectitude of the object and the sanctity of the end, have virtue for their principle, and are performed in a state of righteousness. Whence St. Paul infers, that, as charity is the soul of all good actions, without which they can be of no worth in the sight of the Supreme Being, did we give our possessions to the poor; did we fast every day; did we endure the most rigorous tortures in the cause of heaven; in a word, whatever moral virtues we might practise, in a state of mortal sin, they would have no merit in the eyes of God. And were we so unhappy as to die in this condition, he would make no account of them. However, it is also proper you should know, that, at the instant you are reinstated in grace, by a sincere repentance, the good works, you performed before your fall, revive and recover the privileges, they were prievously entitled to.

I say,

I say, thirdly, that if an action, devoid of grace, which is its principle and life, be without honour and without merit in the sight of God, it must not look for a reward from him: since the recompense we expect, is due only to desert. We are sometimes inclined to think we have done a great deal in behalf of virtue, because we have performed many actions, that are intrinsically good. We suppose ourselves, like the bishop in the Apocalypse, rich and opulent in merit; while, at the same time, we are reduced to the extremity of indigence. And what is the consequence? But that which daily happens to those stupified people, of whom the Psalmist says, that *they have slept out their sleep, and found nothing in their hands.* Ps. lxxv. 6.

Finally, dear Christians, for a work to be good, the intention in doing it must be properly directed. In which regard I do not speak, observe, of such sterile intentions, as, to use a bold expression, may be said to have no aim: but only of those laudable and meritorious views, which in the least, as in the most exalted actions, have God and his glory for their end; as St. Paul so strongly inculcates in his epistle to the Corinthians. Thus, my friends, if you are temperate and sober, strive so to be, not from the consideration of any human respects, but in compliance with the divine law, which enjoins and exacts it. If you are just and upright in your dealings, seek thereby to fulfil your duty, and not to acquire the name and reputation of honest men. If you work to earn your livelihood, let the motive of your labour be to effect the will of God, and to submit to that awful sentence pronounced on all mankind, *in the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread.* Gen. iii. 19. In a word, whatever you do, do it to please God, and advance his glory; and not to serve yourselves, and gratify your feelings.

Yes, O God! we will henceforth be solicitous to please thee alone in the good works, which by thy grace, we may be prompted to attempt. We have nothing to give thee but what thou hast first given us; and, in humbly presenting thee with the sacrifice of our actions, we do no more than offer thee thy own gracious gifts. Grant that in all our works then we may have no other view but the propagation of thy honour. In fine, inspire us, we beseech thee, not only to do good works, but to do them in a proper manner, and to refer all the merit and lustre of them to thee. *For not to us, O Lord! not to us, but to thy name be glory given to an eternity of ages.* Amen.

T H E
E I G H T E E N T H S U N D A Y
After P E N T E C O S T.

O n D E T R A C T I O N.

The scribes said within themselves, he blasphemeth. Matt. ix. 3.

THE doctors of the Jewish law, envious at seeing Christ work such miracles, as they were sensible could be the effects of an exalted and superior virtue only, here accuse him of speaking blasphemy. As if the ease, with which he cures this paralytic, did not sufficiently evince that his power was unlimited. Which of us, then, Christians, can expect to escape detraction, when we see it point its arrows at Sanctity itself? No, my friends, we must not look for it. Detraction is now so general, that, in defiance of the most unspotted innocence, all alike are aspersed, without being either conscious of, or in a capacity to redress the evil. It resembles the stone, that shattered the statue, Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. It flies, it strikes, it breaks every thing to pieces; without discovering the hand, that emits the direful mischief. It wounds by its silence; it brings death in its speech; and, although, a subject of general complaint, there is perhaps not a vice that prevails so universally. And what is still more astonishing, it seems to affect those the most, whom religion is the most studious to warn of its malignity: ourselves, I mean, Catholics? who, with anguish I say it, and with no less veracity, are notoriously addicted to it. But, the more general the crime, the more incumbent

incumbent on God's ministers to attack it with all the vigour his zeal may inspire. This then is the task I here mean to undertake. And to effect it, I will shew, first, that detraction is a source of malediction and to all them, that are guilty of it: and secondly, a cause of happiness to such, as are its objects, and against whom it empties its poisonous quiver. Spirit of Charity! direct us by thy light, and open our hearts to the benevolence of thy doctrine.

To convince you, dear people, that there is not a greater source of malediction than obloquy, the three following reflections will, I hope, be sufficient. First, it renders us the objects of God's hatred. Secondly, it is productive of the most pernicious effects. And thirdly, it is a sin, I will not say irreparable, but of so deep a dye however, as not to be effaced without the utmost exertions. These three heads will shew you of what importance it is to shun the very shadow of this detestable vice.

In the first place, then, I say, my friends, that detraction makes us the objects of the divine abomination. And this, doubtless, on account of its inherent malignity. Hence, St. Paul asserts, that the detractor shall have no share in the inheritance of Christ. Nor was this crime less condemned by the oracles of the old law, than by those of the new. To be satisfied of which, open the book of Leviticus. There, amidst a variety of other forbidden matters, we read a strict prohibition of calumny and defamation. *Thou shalt not calumniate thy neighbour; neither shalt thou speak evil of him, &c.* Levit. xix. 13. But, to be more fully convinced how odious this evil makes us in the sight of the Deity, hear what the Holy Ghost himself says upon the subject. *The whisperer and the double tongue is accursed; for he hath troubled those, that were at peace.* Eccclus. xxviii. 15. Could this God of charity have used a term more expressive of his abhorrence?

But this is not the whole of the matter. Detraction, which makes us odious and detestable to the Almighty, renders us likewise offensive, and execrable to mankind. For what can there be more abominable, than a vice, which spares no one, whether great or little, innocent or guilty, and which too frequently rears its head against the very altar and its ministers? What more hateful, than the man, who arrogates the right of aspersing others, as he pleases; who, coward-like, takes advantage of the dark to assassinate them, and stabs them at a time when they are unable to defend themselves? Such is the detractor, Christians.

For which reasons, Solomon represents him as the scourge of the neighbourhood, he lives in. *A man full of tongue, he says, is terrible in his city.* Eccclus. ix. 25. So much the more terrible, as he acts under cover, and spits his venom at the persons, who are the least deserving of it. So much the more terrible, as his tongue, being set on fire by hell, spreads destruction on every quarter. In a word, of all things terrible, the most so; a world of iniquity; James iii. an abomination to God, and a dread to mankind.

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And here, friends, do not flatter yourselves that levity will exculpate you: especially, if the matter of your slander be considerable. The subsequent reasons will fully shew the contrary. First, because the habit of exposing whatever is said or done, of divulging at random the tattle of the day is a habit incompatible with the law of the gospel, which commands every Christian to lead a retired life, to study his heart, and watch the motions of grace. Secondly, is not this very indiscretion, to which you fly for shelter, prohibited by God; who assures you that he, who cannot bridle his tongue, shall fall into many crimes? *In a multitude of words there shall not want sin.* Prov. x. 19. Thirdly, you cannot be ignorant, on the testimony of Christ, that we must hereafter give an account of every idle word; i. e. of such words, as are neither prompted by faith, nor suggested by reason. What then can we think of obloquy and slander? Of conversation, that tends to traduce our neighbour's character? If indiscretion cannot justify such talk as is indifferent, and whose only fault consists, perhaps, in being empty or imprudent, will it excuse defamation, whose effects, you shall now see, are so pernicious and fatal?

Wherefore, to comprehend, as you ought, the consequences of this crime, observe well the properties, that are inseparable from it. Such then is its nature, that the same blow, as strikes the person defamed, wounds the detractor himself, and all them, that listen to him. If a man be determined to injure himself, the concern is his own. But to bring ruin on others, and involve them in the same guilt, is peculiar to this vice, and a principal effect of it. For what, says St. Bernard, is the view of the detractor? Is it not to fix an odium on the party traduced, and impress every hearer with an hatred and contempt of him?

Hence, no sooner has the poison of defamation reached our ears, than we begin to despise those, whom we previously esteemed. We judge of their actions, and even of their intentions, on a prejudiced authority; which is rash judgment. We act by the received impression, and treat them accordingly; which is injustice. And what is still more, we become detractors ourselves, by hearkening to the slander, and revealing it to others.

Nor are the effects of this vice less hurtful to the person at whom its shafts are levelled, in whose breast it undermines the very foundations of charity. For, my brethren, let me ask you, (and I will allow you all the merit you may think yourselves possessed of) how must the man feel, that finds himself the victim of the most unjust and base slanders? Although he may otherwise be superior to their malevolence, at least will he not wish to retaliate, and return obloquy for obloquy?

Again, let the detractor view the mischief he does his injured neighbour, by indulging this fatal liberty; the confusion he entails upon him; the distress into which he plunges him. This person, robbed of his master's good opinion, is removed from an employ-
ment,

ment, the support of himself and family : that, blasted by the tongue of malice, loses the public credit, on which his prosperity depended. What obstacles did not the calumnies and aspersions of his enemies throw in the way of Christ himself ? How many were deterred from owning and believing in him, by the opposition, which they raised to his person and doctrine ? And how frequently do the detractors of our own days impede the progress of religion, by their malevolent censures of their pastors and directors ? O God ! what an abyss ! O woful defamation ! which spreadest discord so widely, and kindlest animosities, that are perhaps never to be extinguished. For, another peculiar property of this vice is, that the mischief it occasions is not to be done away without the most unutterable difficulty.

And for this, my dear people, reason alone shall be my voucher. They, who heard your slander, imagined you spoke the truth only. How then will you eradicate and rectify their prejudices ? And, although you could, your business is not yet finished. The obloquy is spread already to a very great distance. It has passed from your confidants to those, you are unacquainted with, and from these again to others. By what means will you discover all, who have given credit to your words ? And was this even possible, are you sure of disabusing them ? I say more. Although you were to make a public retraction, and were so happy as to succeed in effacing all bad impressions, still you would fall short of making amends for what you have done. And the reason of it is this. A reputation, that has never been sullied, carries with it a certain candour, which nothing can restore. From the moment a person is censured although one convince the world of his innocence, there remains a fatal something, that darkens and obscures him. His virtue shines no longer with its accustomed and wonted lustre ; as if guilt and defamation were inseparably connected.

And what is still more dreadful is, that the difficulty of redressing this evil does not exempt you from the obligation. But, you say, we were not the authors of it : what we advanced was solely from the voice of common report. Tell me then, brethren, would you allow this excuse to be valid in the mouth of another person : such a one, understand me, as might have belied and slandered you ? You repeated the story on the report of others. But it is a sin to give occasion to detraction. It is a sin to listen to it. It is a sin not to check it, if in your power. It is a sin to lend it any sort of countenance. It is a sin not to clear your brother's character when required. It is a sin to divulge his faults to those that were unconscious of them. And observe attentively, my friends, the last-mentioned sin obliges you to make good the damages occasioned by it. For in detraction, as in theft, the crime is not to be pardoned without the atonement of restitution. But, is it probable I should expose myself, to vindicate a mere acquaintance ? It must be done, however. It is but justice you should forfeit your own, for having

ruined your neighbour's character. The satisfaction is indispensable, and only proportioned to your sin. Without it, no repentance will be available in the sight of heaven.

How then is it possible, that while detraction is so common, restitution should be so rare? I will appeal to your own experience. In spite of so many confessions, in which this article has had its share always, have you yet made satisfaction to your defamed and injured brother. What then can one say, dear people, but tremble for the detractor? O just, but dreadful avenger of the iniquity of the human heart, who wilt so severely punish those, that refuse to alleviate their neighbour's misery, what torments hast thou in store for such, as, by their defamatory speeches, heap infamy and contempt upon him? If the hardhearted and pitiless are to be excluded from the arms of mercy, detracting Christians! what will be your fate?

But, my friends, to discharge my duty fully, besides exposing its malignity, I must supply you with the means of defence against this atrocious and hateful vice: a vice, which the holy Fathers have not scrupled to stigmatize as a mark of reprobation.

How wide would charity reach, and extend its lovely empire, if, less attentive to the faults of others, we did but strive to amend our own! Hypocrite, says Christ, regard not the mote, that is in thy brother's eye, but the beam, which is in thy own. Let this reproach teach you to mind yourselves alone; and be assured you will need no other preservative against the poison of detraction.

Be no less diligent in the use of a second remedy, which is to govern and command your tongue. For that *restless evil*, as St. James terms it, is the origin of all slanders. The Christian's vigilance then in managing it must be proportioned to the immense difficulty of keeping it within bounds.

A third preventive is suggested in the dictates of the wise man. Have nothing to do he says, *with detractors; for their destruction shall rise suddenly.* Prov. xxiv. 21. Should you be in company with them, that traduce their absent neighbour, impose silence on such rash tongues, as neither respect the law of God, nor pay regard to the bond of union, which he has established among men. If you have not the authority requisite, at least convince them by your deportment that you will not participate in their guilt. In a word, Christians, if you desire to avoid the curses entailed upon detraction, be at all times upon your guard neither to say nor listen to any thing, that may reflect upon the absent. Let the general prevalence of this crime be a motive to redouble your care. Let its deplorable effects induce you to detest it, and the extreme difficulty of repairing them ever impress you with a just abhorrence of it. I will now shew you briefly how detraction may become a source of happiness to such, as it takes aim at in all the wantonness of malice.

And,

And, first, I say, bear it with a Christian spirit, and you will recommend yourselves to your Redeemer, by copying his example. Secondly, bear it without repining, and it will prove an antidote against that pride, which would endanger your safety, did the world speak too well of you. Thirdly, bear it with patience, and your patience will prove a supplement to the satisfaction, you owe to the Deity.

In the first place then I say, my brethren, the most certain method of rendering ourselves agreeable to Christ is to receive and bear detraction with his sentiments and spirit. The hatred, the Jews bore him, made him an object of their most bitter rancour. Now if Jesus Christ, the model of innocence, was not secure from the assaults of malice, can his servants expect to be so? Wherefore, to embolden us against it, he tells us daily, by the voice of his pastors, what he told his apostles, by his own mouth: esteem yourselves happy, when men defame you: you weep at present; but the hour shall come, in which I will dry up your tears, and change your sorrow into joy. What then have you to complain of, Christians? But to descend to particulars.

You are traduced, you say; you are calumniated. Was not your Saviour likewise traduced? Was he not calumniated? He delivers the possessed, and the spiteful Pharisee insinuates to the crowd that he works his wonders by the power of Satan; that he himself is a demoniac, and a Samaritan, void of principle; that he is an impostor, who boasts of destroying their temple, and rebuilding it in three days. If a God, says St. Gregory, hears unmoved a language so injurious to his Divinity; he, who could have revenged his cause by the utterance of a single word; with how much more reason should we, dust and ashes, bear patiently the lessening things, that are sometimes said of us? You feel, I do not doubt, my friends, the impression, the example of a God ought to make upon your minds. But, O criminal indocility! It is enough to be informed that you have been mentioned disrespectfully, to irritate your passion beyond the power of control. But, says St. Augustine, think it a snare, the Devil lays to inveigle you. Bear such attacks with patience, and you will find in your tranquillity a sure preservative from pride.

Nature has implanted in us a desire of being honoured and esteemed by our fellow-creatures: and if our actions be not levelled immediately at this end, let us own, at least, that we feel a secret pleasure when applause attends us. With the good opinion of ourselves therefore, which vanity is apt to inspire, if no one contradicts us, how soon are we elated? But let detraction open her lips, and our presumption quickly vanishes. Let her speak, and we are compelled to acknowledge, at least tacitly, that we possessed the phantom of virtue only, when we thought ourselves happy in the acquisition of this bait of treasures.

But a still greater advantage, brethren, is to be derived from defamation. We have all of us many sins to be atoned for to the

Deity. Satisfaction to his justice is among the principles we are taught : and, according to these same principles, to bear injuries patiently is one of the most efficacious of the means afforded us to supply any such deficiencies.

In this light did David, that man of God, consider things when, supported by faith amidst the calumnies, that were thrown upon him, a fugitive as he then was, an insolent Semei dares to load him with reproaches and imprecations. How does this hero act, think you ? Does he return abuse for abuse ? No. He even forbids his friends, those faithful few, that still adhered to him, to interfere, or lay their hands on this rebellious and lawless subject. Hold, he says ; let him talk ; and know that God himself commissions him to try me. In revenging myself, I should become more culpable even than Semei. Whereas, perhaps, in pardoning him, the Lord may take compassion on me, and bestow a blessing for his curse.

The same has been the practice of the Saints of the law of grace ; all of whom have regarded their calumniators and slanderers as instruments in the hands of heaven to purify their virtue. Let their example be our pattern. Thus we shall partake in the benedictions of a God, who only chastises to correct us and to empower us to discharge the debt, we owe to his sovereign justice.

Take up then to-day, my friends, an eternal resolution to avoid this odious vice. Keep in view the precept, your Redeemer lays upon you, to *bear with one another's burthens*. For so says his Apostle, you shall *fulfil the law of Christ*. Gal. vi. 2. Remember these two principles ; first, that detraction is a source of woe to those, that incur its guilt : and secondly, that, if we support it with a christian fortitude, it will crown us with blessings in this life, and with happiness in the next. Amen.

T H E
NINETEENTH SUNDAY
After PENTECOST.

On the Small Number of the ELECT,

Many are called, but few are chosen. Matt. xxii. 14.

MANY are called: how merciful! Few are chosen: how severe! It is thy grace, O Lord! that calls us all. *Many are called*: a subject of consolation. How then does it happen that Christians make so light of it? *Few are chosen*: a subject of terror. Whence comes it then that sinners reflect on it so little? *Many are called*: i. e. the gates of heaven are shut to no one. *Few are chosen*: i. e. if we are not of the small number of the elect, it must be wholly our own fault, and because we wilfully follow the crowd, that wanders from the track of virtue.

Hence let us draw this inference, that to be ranked among the predestinated will depend upon ourselves. The following then, dear people, is the plan of this discourse. First, it is certain that the number of the elect is small: a proposition, that should inspire us with a salutary fear. Secondly, although their number be small, it is in our power to make a part of it: an assertion, that should excite our fervour, and induce us to exert ourselves. Merciful Spirit! who dost compassionate our miseries, soften our obduracy, and impress us with a dread of thy unfathomable judgments.

God alone is acquainted with the number of the elect, and the individuals, that are destined to compose their society. This notwithstanding,

notwithstanding, I do not think it a want of respect to him to elucidate this mystery: a mystery, he himself seems desirous to reveal, by explaining it so far as to give us to understand, that, if all may be saved, a few only will. And to be satisfied of this let us attend, first, to what the scriptures assert; Secondly, to what Christ teaches; and thirdly, to what reason dictates on this head.

Few are saved, my friends. This is a point, which the scriptures insinuate by many figures of the Old, and by many expressions of the New Testament. For what means that tremendous and universal deluge, in which all nations, all ranks, all flesh, in short, were involved; eight persons excepted, who were preserved in the ark. Sodom and Gomorrah are laid waste by a shower of fire: all the buildings, that adorned them, are reduced to a heap of rubbish: the temples demolished, the inhabitants destroyed: only Lot and three others escape the conflagration, by the guidance of an angel. *Few are saved*. Yes, I repeat this solemn truth. Your fathers, says St. Paul, were all favoured alike: they were all conducted by the same Providence: all guided by the same pillar of fire: they all fought under the same leaders; the same miracles were worked for all of them. Nevertheless, he adds, they did not all please God. For of six hundred thousand souls, that were rescued from Egypt, only Josue and Caleb were introduced into the land of promise. And this, continues the Apostle, was but a type of the fate of Christians. What, alas! the six hundred thousand, that perish in attempting to reach the promised land, were but an image of ourselves, struggling in this vale of sorrows. Ah! exclaims St. Augustine, if the figure be so ill-handled, what have not the parties represented to apprehend! *Few are saved*, dear people, *few are saved*.

I confess, Christians, I cannot but shudder when I read what St. Paul affirms in his epistle to the Corinthians. *All run*, he says, but only *one receiveth the prize*. 1 Cor. ix. 24. For observe, he does not here speak of those indolent sluggards, that sleep their time away on the pillow of ease; nor of those obstinate sinners, who, making vice their employment, hourly aggravate their damnation; but of such heroes as behave courageously, and act the part of valiant soldiers. What can he here mean to hint to those he writes to, unless it be the obligation of exerting themselves in running, and the apprehension, they ought to have of being left behind? *An incorruptible crown*, he tells them, is waiting for you: run then in such a manner that you may obtain the glorious recompense.

Nor think, brethren, that this race is the trial of a moment; and that, to gain the palm of victory, it is enough to put yourselves in motion. No; do not flatter yourselves so idly. Every kind of running will not bring you to the happy goal. The way of running in use with the slothful heart, with the divided heart,
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with the heart, that to-day moves forward towards virtue, and to-morrow falls back again to vice, will never bring you to it. *Run* then; but *run*, as God exacts, and your interest requires. *Run*; but in the midst of your race fear lest your sinfulness prove your hinderance. Since, to revert to the oracle of St. Paul, of so many, that run, there is hardly one that deserves to be crowned.

Ah! Christians, let us acknowledge that we are little sensible of our dangers; since we are so unsolicitous to guard against them. Unhappy we, to view with the eyes of indifference those sacred and awful principles, that have made the greatest Saints turn pale, and wither with terror. They trembled; and we, after so many falls, continue thoughtless. Sinners by nature, voluntary, malicious, obdurate sinners, we are unconcerned and fearless of our destiny. Is such a delusion credible? Could we think it even possible, did we not behold it daily?

But to incline you still further to lend your attention to this weighty subject, let us hear what he says of it, who was fully sensible of its difficulties. *Many are called; but few are chosen.* A decisive sentence, and which concerns not only such as refuse to appear at this feast; but principally them, that, accepting the invitation, come to it unprepared. Let us apply this to ourselves, and see what we have to expect. Among those, that, like us, are called to the light of truth, all are preselected in a marked and special manner, with a kindness, that almost borders on violence and compulsion. And yet, in a people so distinguished, there are but few that correspond in every state and profession. Because, in every state and profession, we listen more to the voice of passion, than to the mandates of duty.

But, however sound the principles may be, that I have here deduced from the sacred writings, I will give you others, that are more within your reach, and which shall force you to allow that the number of the elect among ourselves will be very small. And to prove this, without recurring to authorities, it suffices to compare the Christians of modern date, with those of the primitive establishment. We inherit their name; but do we succeed to their piety? A short sketch of the leading features of their character will shew whether our hopes of being ranked among the chosen be as well founded as theirs or not.

And first, to instance in that spirit of charity, which made but one heart of them all. Yes, brethren; in those days, the person would have been looked upon as a monster, who would have, I do not say, calumniated innocence, but even made too free with his censorious remarks. He would have been an object of detestation and abhorrence, who should have, I do not say, meditated revenge, but harboured the slightest aversion even. See, said the astonishing heathen, how they love one another: their philanthropy is without example!

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Here, my friends, to shame you, let me ask where shall I now find the marks of this sacred charity, which is the ground-work of our religion? What proofs do you give that you have but one soul, as you are but one body in Christ Jesus? The detail would be too irksome. But turn this matter over impartially in your minds; and see whether, by this rule, salvation is for the greater number. For my part, when I consider the terms of charity, and weigh in the scale of the gospel the reciprocal duties it enjoins, I am convinced the crowd will be damned; because they certainly fall short of complying with its obligations.

But, as we are now upon instruction, let us carry our researches further. The primitive Christians, solely actuated by the desire of futurity, lived in a perfect disengagement from the world; possessing things in common, that the poor might find wherewith to alleviate their misery.

By this second note examine if the number of the chosen be great among yourselves. It is true, you are not required to give up the inheritance of your families. You are, in no shape, blamable for possessing what has been left you. I even grant the wealth, you are masters of, may be made serviceable to your salvation. But for this, my brethren, your minds must be humble, and your hearts detached. Now, is this poverty of spirit, this disengagement of the affections a thing very usual? Or rather, is it not evident that the infringement of this single article will occasion the loss of thousands?

But the primitive faithful were not content with promoting this lovely union, this amiable charity, this evangelical disinterestedness. They moreover cherished an avowed opposition to the pleasures of life. To be a Christian, in those days, was to lead a life of penance and mortification. To be a Christian, in those days, was to have a fixed and settled station, as I may say, in the receptacles of the criminal. To be a Christian, in those days, was to lay constantly at the mercy of the most inhuman barbarity. The tempest has ceased to rage indeed: but, although the sky be calm, are we in similar dispositions? What do I ask? Do not the most trifling contradictions overpower and get the better of us?

Nevertheless, my friends, this is a matter, on which it ill becomes us to be deluded. Study what your religion prescribes; and you will see whether you have reason to expect to be hereafter counted among the predestinated. It requires you to bear a resemblance to Jesus Christ, in whose name you have been baptized; and to evince, by your deportment, that you are truly conformed to him, on which alone your election is founded. Now, in pursuing your usual conduct, with what front can you pretend to salvation, and hope in future to be of the small number of the chosen?

But if this be the case, you say, we may sit down satisfied, and give it up; for *who then can be saved?* Matt. xix. 25. Besides,

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are we not taught that the last instant of our lives must be the crisis of our doom? This is to say that, to make yourselves easy on the score of your offences, you trust to the resources, which religion offers at the hour of death; to the mercy of the Lord, which is infinite; to the facility of receiving the sacraments; to certain sentiments of repentance, that occur in the last moments. Alas! dear people, if these were sure proofs of a conversion, how many would be saved? What would become of the testimony of your Saviour? You are deceived. Your hopes of dying well, after a continued scene of wickedness, are without foundation; they are groundless, they are unwarranted hopes. Unless one shall have served God faithfully during life, how rare to return to him cordially in the agonies of death!

We may affirm then with assurance that *few will be saved*. So few, says Isaiah, that *they shall easily be numbered, and a child shall write them down*. Is. x. 9. Alas! brethren, are we not petrified with dread at this terrifying sentence? The heavens are shut. The abyss is opened. The great as well as the little, *the strong ones of Israel*, go down in crowds. Perhaps I myself, who am here endeavouring to warn you, shall be numbered among the reprobate. O Sovereign being! What will be my fate, and that of my hearers. Our lives must determine it. But my design is to instruct, and not to plunge you into despair. Let us therefore gather the fruits of this discourse, and draw the inferences, that result from it, as I proposed to do in my second part.

Nothing is more certain than that, although the number of the elect be small, we have all a right to hope to be among them, that shall compose it. For this purpose, however, we must take some prior steps. And what are they? First, to know the road, that conducts to future happiness. Secondly, to examine candidly whether we are truly in it or not. Thirdly, to encourage ourselves to walk on boldly in it. Three reflections, brethren, that claim your whole attention.

In the first place then, I say that we must know the road to heaven, and make ourselves acquainted with what may tend to put us out of it. But as Christ alone could teach us, so must he alone be consulted on the present occasion. Now, he explains himself on this matter so clearly and so explicitly, that no understanding whatever can possibly be at a loss. We read that they, who heard him talk upon this subject, took it into their heads to ask him if it was true that so few would be saved. But what answer does he give them? *The gate is narrow; strive then, and do your utmost to enter by it.*

This principle laid down, dear people, it is a mistake to regard salvation as a thing so easy as not to call for our whole solicitude. It is a mistake to suppose that a state of indolence and inaction, which leaves us, so to speak, between virtue and vice; that a life, exempt indeed from the grosser crimes, but devoid of good works,
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can render our election sure. If we pretend to be associated to the small number of God's chosen, we must necessarily exert our most strenuous endeavours. *Strive to enter by the narrow gate.*

And do not imagine, friends, that when we exhort you to renounce unlawful pleasures; to avoid such occasions, as draw you into sin; to keep a guard over your passions, and the affections of your heart; do not imagine, I say, the path of virtue offers nothing but briars, without any roses; or that the business of salvation presents only difficulties, without any mixture of comfort. You will find quite the contrary, if you apply to your duty seriously. But otherwise do not hope for it. For God relieves only those, that exhaust themselves in his service. No consolation is to be found, but in the testimony of a good conscience: no real pleasure, but in the midst of labour. Yes, the cross has its delights. But still it is a cross; and, to belong to Jesus Christ, we must of necessity take it up.

But it is not sufficient to know the road to heaven, nor to be convinced of its narrowness. We must moreover enter into judgment with ourselves, and seriously enquire if we hitherto have walked in it.

I am sensible that whatever be our state, salvation is always dubious. There is an uncertainty regarding it that God only can unfold. And in this he chooses to leave us both to teach us our dependence on him, and to make us watchful over ourselves. This kind of uncertainty is beneficial and necessary. But there is an uncertainty of another sort, which we bring upon ourselves; and which originates entirely in a criminal indifference, that must absolutely be eradicated. That I mean, in which the generality of people live; who when they are spoke to on the subject of salvation, will reply that they hope to be saved as well as others: but there they stick, and will not join actions with their words. Nevertheless, not to go on at hazard in an affair of such importance, our confidence should be grounded on a firm and solid basis.

Now what is it you depend on, Christians? By what means do you hope to make your election certain? This is a point, it interests you highly to consider: and not to be imposed upon in a matter of so much consequence, you must once more attend to the documents of your Saviour. The way, of which he speaks, that leads to life, is narrow. Wherefore, to discover it, you have only to take notice if they, that walk in it, are comparatively few; for it is always taken by the smaller number. The road, that conducts to perdition, is wide and spacious. Observe if the greatest part choose it; for it is preferred by the crowd. If you follow the few, have confidence, and do not deviate from their footsteps: you are in the right way, and, on the assurance of your God, you may trust it will terminate happily. But, if you go with the multitude, and do as it does, on the testimony of this same God, tremble; for you have every cause to dread. What do I say?

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Your ruin is inevitable. Because this conformity with the world is a prognostic of your reprobation that is almost infallible.

But, my friends, to animate you to go on with courage, it remains to lay before you the motives, that engage you to it. The first of these is your peace of mind, whose anxiety and disquiet have often made you sob. For to speak but the truth. What situation more deplorable than that of the heart, if not yet callous, when astray from the way of salvation? What apprehensions! What alarms! Endeavour then to pursue steadily the road of virtue traced out to you. Does not reason, as well as religion suggest the propriety of sweetening life, and of preparing what may give us comfort at the hour of dissolution?

Another motive is on the part of time, which flies away rapidly. And this motive St. Paul urged to inspirit the Corinthians, under the most severe and trying circumstances. *The time*, he said, *is short*; the world is a passing figure; the evil, it abounds with, are but empty and fleeting shadows. We run therefore to gain a prize, which so few, so very few obtain. The race indeed is fatiguing; but it is confined to narrow bounds. The pilgrimage is disagreeable; but its duration is not long. Whoever be here present, the greatest part of us are far advanced. A few years, a few months, a few days more will complete our course. He, that shall have run steadily through this valley of afflictions, shall repose in the bosom of God. Human weakness! is not this enough for thy encouragement and comfort? Was the duration of thy banishment far longer than what it is, what proportion between thy sufferings and the glory that expects thee?

What further motive shall I suggest, Christians, but ever to keep in view the calamities, you are threatened with? Live as you please; stop, if you like, your ears to the remonstrances of conscience, still the formidable truths, I have here delivered by the aid of heaven, will not be the less certain; nor will they operate less forcibly for having been so frequently repeated. You are told that, although *many be called*, only *few will be chosen*. I urge it once more, and inculcate again that there is every thing to apprehend both for the pastor and for the flock. No, there is no medium between an eternity of bliss and an eternity of woe.

Ah! my dear brethren, who now hear from my lips the immutable oracles of heaven, *barden not your hearts*. Ps. 49. Take the advice of St. Peter, and omit nothing to ensure your safety. Let each individual fear lest he prove that unhappy tree, Christ speaks of in St. Matthew, that shall be sentenced to the flames, for not bringing forth good fruit. You may yet be saved, if you will but try for it. Confide in God's mercy; but do not sleep over your advantages. Dread the abuse of his grace; of that grace, by which he has called you to *his admirable light*. Form now the resolution to save your souls at every hazard. Remove all the impediments to the execution of so noble a project. *Stay not*, as the

the Angel said to Lot, *stay not in the country about thee*; Gen. xix. 17. but *save thyself in the mountain*, by a spiritual retirement amidst the avocations of your business. You are called; and so are many besides you. But this is not sufficient. Secure your vocation by the regularity of your lives. Solicit incessantly, and labour to acquire a well grounded confidence of hereafter being admitted into the number of the chosen few: a blessing, I devoutly entreat the Almighty Sovereign to confer upon you. Amen.

T H E

T H E
TWENTIETH SUNDAY
After P E N T E C O S T.

On P R A Y E R.

There was a certain ruler, whose son was sick. John iv. 46.

HOW beneficent the bounty of the Deity, to grant all our petitions! How extensive his power, to pledge himself to refuse us nothing! How profuse his liberality, to encourage and even press us to solicit him! By these marks we may rest satisfied of the benevolence of our God; who, not content with heaping his favours on us, as in the case of this Ruler, (whose humble prayer was productive not only of his son's cure, but of his own and family's salvation) vouchsafes moreover to afford us the means of laying before him our wants and grievances. But alas! Christians, what use do we make of prayer; a gift so advantageous both to the virtuous and to the wicked; to the virtuous, to preserve them in righteousness; to the wicked, to effect their conversion?

To consider your indifference, might not one be inclined to think that, of all the duties of religion, prayer was the least important? To rouse you from your torpor is the design of this discourse, in which I mean to explain both the extent and spirit of this precept; or in other words, to shew you when and how you ought to pray. As to the former, Christ commands us to pray without intermission; and for the latter, he requires us to make use of certain rules. The reasons, why we should pray incessantly, I will unfold to you, in
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the first place ; and in the second, will discover the means to render our prayers available. But let us previously beg that assistance, which ought to guide us in every step.

Do you desire, says Jesus Christ, to obtain what you want of heaven ? Pray, and pray always. Such, my friends, is the extent of this duty : the necessity, the advantages and the facility of which I will touch upon for your instruction and improvement.

To evince the obligation of prayer, can I take a better ground, than the innumerable necessities under which we labour hourly ? Yes, dear people ; if you can suffice for yourselves, although only for an instant, cease to pray and welcome. But, who is there so presumptuous as to think himself without wants ? We all of us find more than we can describe or express ; and there are still many others, of which we are in no degree sensible, till brought to light by accident. Attacked on every quarter, we are perpetually almost in danger. Our restless passions foment an implacable rebellion. Scarce have we lopped off one vice, before another shoots up : and this subdued, a crowd of fresh ones appear, and call forth new exertions. The enemy of our salvation spares nothing to effect his purposes. If he finds us callous to the lures of pleasure, he holds out the baits of avarice. Who then can doubt of the necessity of constant prayer ? We see it ; we feel it. Every part of us has its weakness ; every object its temptation.

Unskilled therefore, as we are, in the discipline of virtue, and arrant cowards, when called upon to make a stand against vice, what shall we oppose to such innumerable enemies ? In these urgent extremities to whom shall we have recourse ? Or what, O God, will become of us, unless, from the abyss of our misery, thou permittest us to raise our hands towards the throne of thy compassion ?

I own, brethren, that the Almighty, from whom nothing is concealed, perceives what is good for us, both in spirituals and temporals. Nevertheless, he demands the tribute of our prayers. Because he is certainly the dispenser of his own gifts ; and, as such, can dispose of them on the terms, he thinks proper. Now continual prayer is the first condition. For his divine Son assures us that we must *pray always and not faint*. Luke xviii. 1. Whence we may conclude that not even the most just have any thing to expect but through the medium of this channel. Because, as St. Augustine says, graces so valuable, as those, that lead to salvation, are highly deserving of our incessant entreaties.

For in vain, Christians, do you hope to obtain your petitions, unless you steadily persist in urging and repeating them. To merit to be heard, you must imitate the man of whom the gospel tells us that he gives his friend no rest, till he yields to his importunity. How can you expect that favours of the utmost consequence should be granted to passing wishes ; and that, at the instant your vows are formed, the divine mercy should be softened ? Your pride is
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already too extravagant. But to what a pitch of folly would it swell, were the graces of heaven to cost so little? Wherefore, to remind us of our dependence, God wills that the aids, we want, be the recompense of our assiduous and unremitted prayers only.

But how can we be always praying, you say? Such an obligation is incompatible with our labours. Your work, I reply, is a constant prayer, if you submit to it for the love of God. The prayer of the heart is much more acceptable than that of lips. Go then to your employments, brethren. The Deity does not require you to give that time to devotion, which, according to his ordinance, is destined to other business. Pray at the times assigned to prayer. Work at the hours devoted to work. This is the readiest way to accomplish God's will, and to make yourselves agreeable to him.

But, my friends, the necessity of continual prayer will be still more apparent, if we reflect on the great advantages, that result from this sacred duty. Prayer is the surest means to render God propitious. It opens to him our miseries, and engages him to befriend us. It is the channel, through which every grace must be derived. It is an homage, that we owe to his Sovereign dominion. It is an avowal of our inability, and of that dependence, in which he keeps us, that the perpetual need of his help may unite us to him indissolubly.

But, to be persuaded of the consequence of prayer, consider its power and efficacy. Yes, dear people, the power of prayer is unlimited. It includes the whole creation, and influences the Creator himself. One would think that death, which subdues all things, and which levels the monarch with the slave, should be invincible and uncontrolled. However, when we see Ezechias, obliging it to retire, and commanding it not to shew its face again for the space of fifteen years, we are compelled to own the force of prayer to be superior to the triumphs of death. The boisterous ocean, in its foaming pride, seems to bid defiance to restraint. But behold it dividing at the command of Moses, and giving a passage to God's inheritance, and confess the virtue of prayer. To contemplate the celestial bodies, whose motions are so regular; it seems impracticable to alter them. Yet the history of Josue informs us, that this power was reserved to prayer. In short, nothing is impossible to it. Whence St. Ambrose styles it omnipotent, and asserts that its mighty efficacy is beyond the reach of bounds.

Again, when we pray, to whom do we address ourselves? To the most merciful, the most compassionate, the most tender of all parents. Yes, says Christ, *ask*, and if you do it with perseverance, *you shall undoubtedly receive*. For do not you yourselves, he adds, callous as you are, give way to importunity? How much more readily will your heavenly Father listen to them, that solicit him without ceasing? And here, Christians, admire the singular privileges of the children of faith. It is not a friend you petition, an

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inconstant, and often faithless friend: it is not a hard-hearted, imperious master, who frequently prides himself on his insensibility. No. It is a father. It is a most indulgent and affectionate parent. Perhaps the means of some of you may be nearly exhausted. But what have you to fear? Is not such a support an ever-present resource? He is *your heavenly Father*; the Author of nature, whose independent happiness only makes him the more favourable, and the more ready to supply your wants. But what is it you are to expect of him? Not the transitory things of the flesh, which are often as pernicious as trivial, and are therefore unworthy of a Christian's desire: but the incorruptible things of the spirit, which are productive of eternal felicity; the only secret of obtaining which, is to sue for them with fervour.

Let this suffice for your encouragement, dear people: especially when you are told, that God refuses nothing to a persevering confidence, and delights to go beyond our wishes even. *I have given thee wisdom*, he says to Solomon, *because thou hast asked for it. Yea, and the things also, thou didst not ask for, I have given to thee; viz. riches and glory.* 3 Kings iii. 13. So true it is that the Lord will provide for all our wants, if we lay them open to him with perseverance.

But to pray without intermission is a hard task, you say. What then do you imagine that continual prayer to be, which is here exacted of you? It is the elevation of the soul, conscious of its misery, and which seeks incessantly to be relieved from it. It is the cry of the heart. It is a fervent aspiration towards God. It is a constant desire to please him. Now find, if you can, the time, the place, or the employment, that excludes the possibility of always praying according to this explication. Look to your farms, inspect your accounts, attend to your families; all these, no doubt, are serious occupations. But tell me candidly, are they not compatible with the constant prayer, I here inculcate? We are incapable to keep our minds perpetually fixed on heaven. At least desire it; and, if your desire be continual, so will your prayer likewise.

But it is too much to impose such a burthen on us. Yes, my brethren, I recommend to you to pray incessantly, and I recommend it on the authority of our common master, Jesus Christ. It is the surest method to guard you against the dangers of dissipation, in which you too generally pass your lives. And, if you rightly comprehend the above explanation, there is nothing in this constant prayer that is either troublesome in itself, or inconsistent with your labours. Because this mode of prayer consists entirely in a habit of always acting with an intention of pleasing God, and a desire of doing every thing in him, and for him. For own the truth, my friends, do you think much of any difficulties, that occur in the pursuit of wealth? What do I say? Do you not experience the greatest satisfaction in concerns of this nature, though frequently attended with the most mortifying vexations? If your salvation then

was equally dear ; if you were as zealous to serve God, as you are to make your fortune, would you think the command of your Saviour, which enjoins you to pray always, a burthensome command ? Rather, would you not find in it your joy, and a support ever at hand amidst the tribulations of human life ? But if the extent of this precept requires that we should pray at all times, the spirit of it exacts that we should pray by certain rules.

Now, the whole of these rules may be reduced to the two following heads : first, to pray in the name of Christ : secondly, to pray in a manner, that may be worthy of the God we supplicate.

It is written, that *every good gift cometh from above, and descendeth from the Father of lights*. Previously to man's fall, through the artifice of Satan, the super-excellent gift of grace was communicated immediately from the breast of God into the heart of man : as the petitions of man were wafted from his heart into the bosom of the Deity without intervention. But, sin having broke off and put an end to that lovely intercourse, man can no longer ask any thing of God directly by himself. A mediator is become necessary ; and who should this be but Jesus Christ our Redeemer ? A mediator in all regards both compassionate and powerful. *Compassionate*, I say. For we have not now an advocate, who cannot sympathize in our infirmities ; but one vested with our nature, and acquainted with our miseries, before whom we may present ourselves with confidence and trust. I also say *powerful*. For of him alone it can be said, that he is heard, as St. Paul affirms, for the reverence due to his person. What may we not hope for then ?

Do not therefore imagine, Christians, that when the Lord hears our requests, it is in consequence of either what we are, or what we deserve ; since of ourselves we are nothing, and incapable of merit. When the Almighty listens to us, it is for the sake of his Son ; because his beloved Son has prayed for us, when we could not pray for ourselves, and will continue to be our advocate till time shall be no more. The success of our petitions then depends upon their union and conformity with those of Christ. Wherefore, to render them efficacious, we ought to have the same object in view, and a like will in praying as our heavenly intercessor.

And what, dear people, was heretofore, and still continues to be the object of our Saviour's prayers ? No other than our sanctification. To this day he repeats on his throne what he said formerly on the eve of his passion ; Father ! I ask not that my disciples may be blessed on earth ; my sole request for them is, that they may truly partake in thy sanctity ; *sanctify them in truth*. John xvii. 17. And is this the point, my brethren, in which your wishes centre ? If sometimes you appear more than usually fervent, is it with the design to be more moderate in your passions, more disinterested in your pursuits, more patient under your sufferings ? Rather, is it not to implore success on your undertakings, and prosperity through life ?

But be not deceived; St. Augustine says: to pray for things unconnected with the interests of futurity, is not to pray in the name, and by the authority of Christ. This he hints to his disciples, when, on the point of leaving them, he speaks as follows: *Hitherto you have not asked any thing in my name.* John xvi. 24. because they had requested nothing conducive to their salvation. A reproach, that might be made with no less truth to many of you, my friends, who, wrapped up in the concerns of life, have still to pray for what may lessen your zealousness, and augment your charity; abate your love of the world, and increase your fervour; in a word, amend your faults, and make you better Christians.

But is it wrong then to pray for temporal things? No: for the Church itself employs her credit in the prosecution of such purposes. But how does she petition for them? In the same order as her spouse does; i. e. with subordination to the views of heaven. Sanctify, O Lord! she says, my children: make them chaste, humble, patient; and give them such a share of the present good things, as may conduct them with security to the acquisition of those to come. This is the order Christ prescribes, and which the Church copies exactly; but which we too often invert, and model to our views. There is another abuse still, however, of which perhaps you are not conscious.

I am willing to hope that the main object of your prayers is the business of salvation. But, like Christ, do you conform your will to that of God? Or rather, are you not desirous to bend his will to yours; for in this regard many are deluded. On hearing a discourse, that touches their feelings, they beg of heaven to convert them. But they implore it for the moment only. They pray for this grace, as St. Augustine did for the gift of continence, which he dreaded to receive. You would be sorry God should take you at your word. You are willing to be converted; but not as yet, while your passions are alive, and uninjured by the hand of time. And what is this, but to ask of God a grace, that defeats the views of his providence; a grace, he never has granted; and finally, a grace he never can grant, because he is incapable of belying and falsifying his word.

But, besides praying in the name of Christ, we must also pray in such a manner as may become the Supreme Majesty. If our petitions be levelled at trifles only; if they go no further than human things, they insult the Lord, instead of honouring him; because they fall short of that sublime dignity, which is essential to his nature.

But what then is the meaning of those words: *All things, whatsoever you ask, when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.* Mark xi. 24. Christ promises to grant us every thing, that we may set no bounds to our desires. He makes us large offers, to encourage us to ask largely: i. e. to teach us to pray with that assurance of faith, which, St. James says, does not hesitate, and to which the Deity always yields. And sure nothing more likely

to dispose God in our favour, than that firm and steady confidence, which, to our confusion let us own, is almost constantly wanting in the prayers we present to him.

For, in fine, my brethren, when do we apply to heaven? When every human source is drained. Alas! let us dread lest, in lieu of that commendation, which Christ bestowed on the Centurion, *I have not found so great faith in Israel*; he should reproach us, as he did St. Peter, *why art thou afraid, O man of little faith?* Or why dost thou doubt of my power? You pray indeed, and that frequently; but you abandon yourselves to anxiety. You run to me; but it is only at the last extremity, when every thing else has failed you. You rely on me; but you trust to yourselves still more. Ungrateful and faithless Christians! Why do you distrust my benevolence? What more is wanting to incline me to stop my arm? To avoid this his just reproach, my friends, let the example of the Centurion excite and rouse our faith. For, if our belief be firm like his, we shall pray as much as we ought, and in the manner we ought; and shall completely fulfil both the precept and the spirit of this momentous obligation.

Wherefore, dear people, let us determine from this hour to be careful in using the means, that may render our petitions grateful: to pray with humility and with attention, which are other conditions of prayer, that my limits forbid the mention of. Above all, let us pray in the sacred mansions of our God. It is there Jesus Christ resides, the Eternal Priest and only victim worthy of the Divinity. It is there the weak may be made strong; and sinners, blended with the just, may become virtuous and saints. It is there, in short, the Church, that chaste and immaculate spouse, wafts her sighs to heaven: sighs, that ever challenge the respect of the Sovereign Being. Let us pray in all places. For, since Christ has cleansed it by the effusion of his blood, the whole earth is become a temple, in which we may offer our petitions to him. Once more then, let us pray; and, as I have here so frequently repeated, let us pray without ceasing. Thus we shall move and draw down the grace of God; and this will prepare and dispose us for his glory. Amen.

T H E
T W E N T Y - F I R S T S U N D A Y
A f t e r P E N T E C O S T .

O n t h e S U F F E R I N G S o f a M I D D L E S T A T E ,

And his Lord being angry, delivered him to the tortures, until he should pay all the debt. Matt. xviii. 34.

TH E design of this lesson, Christians, is to inculcate the love of our brethren, and to shew us the necessity of forgiving them, that injure us: a matter, of which you were convinced, I hope, when I handled this branch of charity, on the fifth Sunday after Pentecost. At present I intend to draw from it a different instruction; but an instruction, I say, still referable to this same important subject; inasmuch as it regards our acquaintance, our intimates, our parents; in a word, all those, with whom we have lived, and who by the decrees of heaven, are gone before us into the regions of the dead.

The conduct of this wicked servant towards his debtor is descriptive of that of the Deity towards such, as die contaminated with the guilt of venial sin. He will cast them into prison, and will say to them; *thou shalt not go from thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing.* Matt. v. 26.

Reason as you please, my friends, it is an unquestionable principle that sin must be expiated either here or hereafter. We must do penance or burn. Another principle, no less certain, is that this penance must bear a proportion to the crime it is meant to atone for. Nevertheless, it is true that, in pardoning our offences,
God

God is willing to forgive us the eternity of wo, entailed upon their malice. But let us not be so deluded as to suppose he will exempt us from the temporal punishments due to them.

These principles, which are as sure, as they are calculated to alarm us, being admitted, if we desire to find mercy hereafter, we must practise it at present, in regard to the faithful departed. To this point I mean to lead you, brethren, for your edification and welfare. To accomplish which happy ends, I will, first, set before you the rigours of purgatory; and secondly, will shew the cause of the sufferings there inflicted. But let us previously implore the aid and support of *the Father of mercies*.

I do not fear to assert, dear people, that the sufferings of the middle state are exquisite, immense, and inconceivable. First, because nothing is more dreadful than the loss of God, from whom they are separated. Secondly, because nothing is more excruciating than the fire, to which they are sentenced.

It is a truth, founded on experience, that, of all punishments, there is none so great as to love, without being able to possess the object of our affections. And this the Wise-man insinuates, when he tells us, that *love is as strong as death*. Cantic. viii. 6. For, says St. Gregory, its effect, in regard to the mind, are similar to those of death, in regard to the body: and as the latter extinguishes our feelings with respect to the objects of sense; so does the former make them, that love God ardently, insensible to every thing temporal, from the desire of what is eternal. It is a glowing fire, St. Ambrose says, in the hearts of the Saints, which refines the dross of human corruption, and purifies whatever it touches. There are few among us, Christians, that are acquainted with it in this degree. But give me a heart, that loves passionately, exclaims St. Augustine, and it will feel what I aver.

Now, if the impatience of charity be so exceedingly distressing, judge, brethren, what the souls in purgatory must suffer, whose ideas of the Divinity are far more clear than ours. For, as the Wise-man says, our knowledge of God is very incomplete: because *this corruptible body depresseth the mind*. Wis. ix. 15. But the souls in purgatory, emancipated from the ties of the flesh, and no longer affected by those sensible objects, that envelope us, tend only towards him, their sovereign and sole good, whom they know, with all his perfections. And as their acquaintance with his attributes is the measure of their love, so both these things unite to produce in them a vehement longing to see and possess him: insomuch that, finding themselves still excluded from his presence, they undergo more from this privation than description can delineate.

Nor am I surprised at the intenseness of their grief, when I call to mind the piercing regret, the bitter sorrow of Absalom, on being removed from his father's sight. This prohibition was so insupportable to him, that he told the commander Joab that, if David could not pardon him and overlook his crime, he rather wished

wished to be put to death, than not enjoy his presence. Ah! dear Christians, if such an ungracious son as Absalom, in whose bosom nature itself had already lost its power, thinks himself so wretched, that he prefers the loss of life to the forfeiture of David's presence, how extreme must be the anguish of these tender and pious souls, who cannot obtain the comfort of seeing him, in whom their affections centre?

And here, my friends, indulge me with a momentary digression. Howsoever great we may suppose the dignity of these souls, I represent them to myself as still unhappy; both because God is present with, and because he is absent from them. Unhappy from his presence; since he is only with them to make them feel the weight of his vengeful arm: unhappy from his absence, since he seems to have laid aside all compassion in their regard. Unhappy from God's presence; because it occasions them to suffer the most cutting regret, the most racking anxiety, the most intolerable grief: unhappy from his absence; because it deprives them of all joy, all consolation, all rest. In vain do they sigh, do they pray, do they moan: their sighs are useless, their prayers ineffectual, their moanings unheard. Heaven to them is a heaven of brass. There is no one at hand to wipe away their tears. They seek God, and he flies from them; they look for him, and he hides himself. In this abandoned state they exclaim; alas! O Lord! where shall we find a shelter from the inflictions of thy justice? *Who will grant me this, that thou protect me, till thy wrath pass?* Job xiv. 13. To mitigate our sufferings, appoint us at least a time, in which thou wilt remember, and compassionate our wretchedness.

This time, dear people, is in some measure at our disposal. We may assign, if I dare so to speak, the wished-for moment of their deliverance. Their salvation is in our hands. Yes, my brethren, it is your part to hasten it by your endeavours. Sacrifice and alms-deeds will quickly afford them comfort. If the mediocrity of your fortune forbids you to take the latter method, you may at least do them this kind office by the mediation of the former; that so the Sovereign judge may abridge the time of their sufferings; may remember them in his mercy, and receive them into bliss.

And truly, Christians, to refuse to alleviate their sorrows, would be to give the strongest proof possible of your ingratitude and hard-heartedness. For who are they that suffer? They are your friends, who, during life, rejoiced at your prosperity, and consoled you in adversity; who partook in your mirth, and sympathized in your grief. They are brothers united to you by the strictest bonds of charity. They are your parents, that gave you life, and fed you with their labour. And can you be so ungrateful, as to profit by their industry, without so much as thinking of them? You are obligated to assist them both by the law of nature, and by that of religion, which requires you to extend your charity to all your fellow-

fellow-members And who more deserving of it than those unhappy souls, who are completing their course of sufferings, the Almighty justice has consigned them to?

It is the opinion of the holy Fathers that the souls in this middle state are purified by fire. And on this head St. Augustine is clear, when, explaining those words of the Psalmist, *O Lord! rebuke me not in thy indignation*, do not punish me, he says, in thy anger, my God! but so cleanse me from my sins, that I may not be one of them, that *shall be saved, yet so as by fire.* 1 Cor. iii. 15. It is true, this fire is not eternal, as that of hell is: but for the rest, brethren, its operation on the soul is so active, that St. Gregory thinks it no less penetrating than that, which shall have no end. And to form some judgment of it, it is sufficient to be apprized that it is kindled by the breath of a God. O treasury of wrath! what terrors dost thou contain? To see nothing, to feel nothing, to breathe nothing but flames! What tremendous sufferings! in viewing which, the imagination shrinks back, appalled with horror. Yes, says Tertullian, in this fire, as in a repository of torments, all other punishments are collected; all those, the savage cruelty of the tyrants could invent; all those, the general constancy of the martyrs could support; all those, the fancy can paint in the most terrifying colours. Punishments, in short, in comparison with which the most barbarous tortures, that can be afflicted in this life, appear trivial and insignificant.

And what should move you still more, my friends, in favour of these suffering souls is that they are unable to relieve themselves, or procure a mitigation of the evils, they endure. In the words of David they cry out; *the sorrows of death surround me, and the perils of hell encompass me*; Ps. 17. Why then, O God of Justice! dost thou reject our lamentations? Why dost thou complete our misery, by alienating our former acquaintance from us, who now seem to regard us as the objects of their horror only? Imagine, if you can, a more deplorable situation, than to live in a state of the most intense and constant sufferings, without being able to obtain the smallest comfort.

Ah! dear brethren, hear their complaints, as delivered by the afflicted Job. *Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends; because the hand of the Lord hath touched me.* Job xix. 21. If you have any feeling left, be mindful of us: if you are mindful of us, compassionate, and assist us in our distress. The hand of the Deity keeps us down, do you raise us up. His justice torments, let your charity console us. We suffer the punishments justly due to our sins; mitigate them, if you can, by your alms, or at least by your fervent prayers. Would you *persecute us like God*, and glut yourselves with our sorrows? Such, Christians, are the sufferings, the state of purgatory presents us with. It remains to shew you briefly how these sufferings are incurred.

Strange

Strange blindness of the human understanding! Deluded by the wiles of error, if it loses not entirely the idea of its real happiness, how often does it mistake it? How empty the phantoms, that beguile us! How visionary the fears, that warp us! How ungrounded the assurances, that encourage and embolden us to go on without remorse!

In general, we make light of such frailties, as may delay the possession of the felicity, we aspire to. We are unsolicitous to repair them by the tears of a true repentance: and, what is still more surprising, we scarcely apprehend the satisfaction owing for them. Such are the defects, dear people, that ought to make us dread, if not the flames of hell, at least the fire of purgatory. Defects, observe, which, to speak more plainly, consist, first, in the little account we make of sin; secondly, in the little care we take to satisfy for it; and thirdly, in the little fear we harbour of the sufferings of this middle state.

It is strange to see the unconcern, with which the generality of us offend in such matters, as we term venial. It is no more than a venial sin, we say; and a venial sin is but a trifle. But, my friends, this very circumstance is an addition to your guilt, and renders you inexcusable. If the fault be so trivial, why then do you commit it? In my opinion, it is this point, in particular, that shews the grievousness of venial sin. Was the matter in question the gratification of a violent passion, I might reproach you with your weakness; yet, after all, while I condemned, I should also pity you. But, in the case of venial sin, wilfully indulged I mean, it is no longer weakness, but malice. It is no more than a venial sin. But, does not your contempt for the divine law, does not the scandal you give to others, does not the malignity of your views entirely change its nature? It is no more than a venial sin. I am willing to suppose it. But does not a venial sin offend your God, the highest of all sovereigns, the best of all parents, the most faithful of all friends?

And here, Christians, reflect on the cause why the souls in purgatory endure so much. What you are so easily and carelessly unconcerned about is one of their greatest torments. The sole thought of having offended God, although but venially, is like a dart, that pierces their inmost souls. Their grief is inconsolable for having alienated their Sovereign good for the sake of an empty trifle. For this alone is the reason why he banishes them from his presence; why he detains them in this horrid prison; why he makes them undergo the most excruciating sufferings; sufferings, that are dreadful, excessive, incomprehensible. Doubtless, as there is no punishment more just than that, occasioned by the sight of their sins, so neither is there any more grievous, nor more afflictive to their senses.

Ah! brethren, what an extenuation of their misery would it be, was God inclined to grant to those distressed souls the favours,
he

he bestows on us! Far from incumbering themselves with fresh debts, how industrious would they be to discharge the past, both by the sanctity of their lives, and by the rigour of their austerities? Deeply impressed with the idea of the Majesty of God and the severity of his justice, should we not find them as intent on pleasing him by the purity of their love, as by the fervour of their prayers? more ready than Abraham to part from their dearest connections: more generous than Isaac to offer themselves in sacrifice: more submissive than Jacob in the most slavish employments: more patient than Job in the most trying occurrences: more zealous than Elias for the propagation of his glory and the aggrandizement of his kingdom?

But what am I attempting, Christians? Without dwelling on the supposed industry of those disconsolate souls, were they in a capacity of acting, why do not we think on what our own duty requires? Why, after the commission of so many atrocious crimes, are we so dilatory and backward in making satisfaction for them? Why do we still continue to be so fond of ourselves, and so averse to the cross of Christ? What then! Is not heaven deserving of our most serious endeavours? Or can we expect to reach it by any other way than that, which Jesus Christ has traced for our direction? Do we not know that unless we die with him, we can have no part in his resurrection?

But I will do penance in purgatory, you reply. God grant, my friends, that such of you, as act upon this principle, may not be reduced to do it in the mansions of the damned. For what assurance have you to support your bold assertion? But, although it should be true that God will favour you so far, as to allow you to do penance among those, that are gone before you, is it a reasonable way of thinking to wish to do it there, where it will be so rigorous and harsh. Do you reflect on what you are saying? And has what I have here told you, respecting the terrors of purgatory, made so faint an impression on you? Alas! The trifling evils of this life, alarm, deject, oppress you: and you are not afraid, you are even desirous to fall into the hands of the living God; an avenging God; a God, who is not to be appeased with prayers, not to be softened with tears, not to be moved with mercy, till his justice be fully satisfied. What an inconceivable perverseness!

Preserve, O God! this thy people and myself from such a blindness. Pierce us with thy holy fear to the very marrow of our bones. Teach us, like Job, to be so distrustful of all our actions, as to perform none without weighing them in the balance of the sanctuary. And, to satisfy for our sins, inspire us to apply, by worthy fruits of penance, the merits of our Saviour's passion. *Thou hast been our refuge, O Lord!* Ps. 89. in having framed us to thy image. Be so still, in moulding us to the resemblance of thy perfections. Thou canst, we know, annihilate us: but thy
compassion

compassion will render thee propitious to our sighs. Vouchsafe then, O God of mercies ! to look upon thy servants, the work of thy hands. Prostrate at thy feet, with tears in our eyes, and compunction in our hearts, we conjure thee to forgive us. *Direct thy children.* Ib. that thy light may discover to us the rigour of thy justice, the enormity of our faults, and the extent of our obligations ; that it may make us obedient to thy commands ; may induce us to renounce sin ; and, finally, may conduct us to the possession of thy bliss. Amen,



T H E

T H E

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY

After PENTECOST.

On the Observance of the Divine Law.

Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's; and to God the things that are God's. Matt. xxi. 22.

SUCH is the answer of Jesus Christ to the Pharisees, who, under the cloak of deference to his judgment, conceal their black design of attempting his sacred person. An answer, which, while it silences his enemies, affords to his friends a most serious and useful lesson. St. Chrysostom, explaining this passage, asserts that to give to man what belongs to man, and to God what belongs to God, are two points easily to be allied. Because, according to St. Paul, all powers being *ordained by God*, Rom. xiii. 1. in paying obedience to our rulers, we pay obedience to God himself. Wherefore, let us ever be attentive to render to each their respective dues.

And to discharge this obligation, as far as it relates to the Deity, let us candidly examine if hitherto it has been our study to *render to God* what we owe him; if we have given him our whole allegiance; if our ideas of his sacred law have been such, as to determine us invariably to a faithful observance of it. Alas! Christians, without waiting for your answer, may I not venture to say to you what our Saviour said to the Jews; *no one among you fulfils the law?* For either we find it too severe, or ourselves unequal

qual to it. My design therefore is to convince you that your complaints are ungrounded ; and that you are guilty in the extreme, when you neglect to do your utmost to keep this heavenly law. In short, I propose to shew you, first, the obligations it lays upon us ; by which you will perceive it is not so rigorous, as you imagine : and, secondly, how to accomplish it ; which will discover to you your backwardness. Author of light ! remove our darkness, and conduct us, we here implore, through the mist of error, that surrounds us.

So far is the law of God from being injurious to our freedom, that it confirms it in all its latitude. Whence it is styled by St. James a law of *perfect liberty*, which alone can ensure us rest. To be satisfied of which, my friends, it will be enough to investigate the obligations it enjoins. Now, these obligations, I say, are threefold. Obligations in regard to God : obligations in regard to our neighbour : obligations in regard to ourselves. And, in which ever light you view it, I hope to make it clear that, although the divine law be branded with the name of rigid, it contains nothing in itself, that can justify the imputation.

To adore God, to serve him, to love him preferably to all things, are the leading articles prescribed by the dictates of his law. And are these duties so difficult, when we reflect that the Lord, whom we are commanded thus to worship, is infinitely great, infinitely good, infinitely powerful ?

God is great. Alas ! what is all worldly grandeur ? What the monarchs of the earth, in comparison with the Deity ? Yes, God is great ; and he alone is truly so. *Great is the Lord*, says the Psalmist, *and highly to be praised ; and of his greatness there is no end.* Ps. 144. What objection then can we have to adore and love a God, so superlatively eminent ? Were we able to comprehend the extent of his Supreme majesty, we should be sensible of our inability to serve him as he merits. Let us dive into it, as far as possible however, and we shall readily obey him. Nothing will then seem hard ; but we shall cheerfully exert ourselves to honour him with the tribute of the most animated zeal. *Come*, says David, *let us adore our God, and fall down before him ; let us weep before the Lord, that made us ; for he is the Lord, our God.* Ps. 49. Such was the homage this pious Monarch rendered to him : an homage so much the more illustrious, as it was the result of his acquaintance with the Sovereignty of his grandeur.

Moreover, God is infinitely good. What a motive to induce us to be faithful to his commands ! He has loved us from the beginning ; *so as to give us his on'y Son, that whoever believeth in him may not perish ; but may have everlasting life.* John iii. 16. He loves us at present, so as to compassionate and spare us, when we insult him by sin. Nor is this all, dear people. For, *having loved his inheritance, he loved them to the end.* John xiii. 1. In proof of which he gives them his own sacred flesh for their daily food and sustenance. In a word, on whatever side we turn ourselves,

selves, we are compelled to acknowledge that we have nothing we do not hold of his bounty and munificence.

And to engage you more effectually to be obedient to the divine law, Christians, I add that the God, who exacts your service, unites with the above attributes a power no less supreme. *He spoke, the scripture tells us, and all things were made.* Observe the heavens and the earth, the trees, the flowers, the corn. Nor stop here, says St. Augustine; but admire his Almighty hand in the most minute and little insects: see the delicacy of their frames, and the nicety of their organization. But, if the mark of the Divinity be so visible in these smaller things, how much more apparent is it in the larger works of nature? Truly we may say, brethren; *O Lord, God of virtues! who is like to thee?* Ps. 70. Serve then your God faithfully, since he is so great, so good, so powerful. Sincerely lament that you have so often preferred the austere maxims of the world to the amiable precepts of your bountiful Creator. Say to him from your heart; thou, O Lord! art our Master; teach us then to obey thee with fidelity and steadiness.

Would you see the picture of a Christian, who is truly submissive to the mandates of God's law? He is a man, who serves his Maker to the full extent of his abilities. He is a being entirely spiritual, who, actuated by faith, places his happiness in God alone. He is a servant ever attentive to the will of his Superior. He is a soldier ever active to oppose the enemies of his King, and ever ready to part with his life, rather than yield them the least advantage. But to proceed; in the next place, let us examine the obligations, this law enjoins in relation to our neighbour.

If you desire to accomplish the commands of heaven in this regard, you must be humble, patient, disinterested and charitable. The person, that wishes to behave to his neighbour as the law of God prescribes, so far from purloining, or even coveting what is not his own, is disposed at least, to share with him what he has; and will sooner forget an injury, than the most ungrateful can a favour. Now, do not these obligations, as many others I might mention, entirely coincide with our interest and welfare? And do they then deserve to be deemed so repugnant? How truly deplorable would our situation be were the hostile acts of passion permitted by that law, which now forbids them so severely? Theft, rapine, murder and a deluge of other evils would inevitably break in upon us; the unhappy consequences of which I cannot doubt but you feel, when you consider them as they relate to yourselves and your property. How perverse then must you be to accuse that system of rigour, which condemns every attempt injurious to your neighbour?

Add to this, my dear people, that the law of God commands us to assist our fellow-creatures to the utmost of our power: to be an eye to the blind and a foot to the lame, according to the expression

tion used by Job: to pay attention not only to their temporal, but also to their spiritual wants: to bring back to the road of virtue such, as passion leads astray: to dry up the tears of them, that corroding grief oppresses. Be but sincere then. Does the divine law, in thus seconding the finest feelings of our nature, impose any thing upon us, that can with truth be styled too much?

For, in short, not to delude ourselves, it must ever be our care to preserve *the unity of the spirit in the bond of christian peace*. Otherwise we forfeit the privilege of our inheritance; we forego the advantages of our baptismal renovation; we become unworthy of the title of the members of Jesus Christ. Because we cannot have God for our father, unless we do our best to live in amity with our brethren. This is the foundation, the very soul of the christian institute.

Neither is it hard to exculpate this sacred law, if we consider it in such of its precepts, as relate to ourselves. For to call a man an observer of it, is the same thing as to say that he is humble, chaste, temperate; that his life is a continued struggle to subdue his rebellious passions, and that he uses creatures from necessity only, without sharing his affections with them. I own these commands are harsh. But to whom? To such remiss and lax people, who, on the plea of its great severity, take no pains to fulfil what this holy law enjoins. Examine its mandates closely; and you will find that the denials, which at first sight appear so rigorous, have no other design in view than that of your real welfare.

Again, my friends. On what are your complaints against the law of God founded? Do you speak from experience, or from want of inclination? It is intolerable, you exclaim. But what, I ask, makes it so? Is it your weakness or your indolence? Alas! you betray no weakness, but in the cause of God and righteousness. On the contrary, how alert, how industrious, how indefatigable are you, when called upon by interest, or the siren-voice of pleasure! But that your charges may be admissible, begin by fulfilling it. Then indeed you may remonstrate with something like a grace.

One more reflection, Christians, and I will finish this first part. The law of God seems rigid to them, only, that do not love him. For to a heart inflamed with charity it is amiable in all its mandates. St. Augustine, on this subject, introduces the Deity speaking, and reproaching us as follows: Examine the merits of each party, and decide for yourselves: avarice enjoins you to brave the winds, and scorn fatigue. Avarice is obeyed; while my injunctions, although levelled solely at your happiness, are, rejected as impracticable. Is it not a shame that the world should have a greater influence on us than our Creator? that we should continually raise difficulties, when heaven speaks, and make light
of

of every obstacle at the command of fordid passion? Blush at the very idea, and resolve for the time to come to obey the divine law with all the fidelity you can. But next, let us examine in what this fidelity consists.

The most essential duty of a Christian is to know and to comply with the commands of the Lord, his God. But what is the general practice of such, as style themselves his followers? A total disregard almost of the precepts of their Maker. Wherefore, to prevent, as much as possible, the contagion of their example, I will here shew the rules of the obedience he requires of us. First, we must obey his law promptly; so as to take it up without demur. Secondly, we must obey it universally; so as to comply with it in all its articles. Thirdly, we must obey it with constancy; so as to adhere to it to the end.

Nurtured in the bosom of that sacred religion, in which God is adored *in spirit and truth*, gratitude calls upon us to devote our days to his service. But how little, alas! do we hearken to her? Tepid and cold in the interest of virtue, we pride ourselves on being zealous Christians at the very time we are faithless rebels.

For instance; we know we must reform our lives, and that, to do it to the purpose, we must renounce our evil habits. But when will this take place? No one is willing to fix the time. On the contrary; every one endeavours to ward off the evil day, and replies with the insolvent debtor, *have patience with me, and I will pay thee*. Matt. xviii. 26.

And what, brethren, is wanting to inspirit and invigorate us? Oh! it is that ardour from above, which animated the Peters, the Magdalens, the Augustines. For such, says St. Bernard, is the pre-eminence of charity. We grant willingly to it what we refuse to the threats of wo. Under the impulse of the fear of hell, we continue undecided; but, influenced by the spirit of charity, we break forth into immediate action. A spark of it would suffice to make us ashamed of our tepidity, and stimulate our indifference.

I confess, my friends, it is no small matter of surprise to see the attempts, that people make to distinguish between the mysteries and the precepts of God's law. They submit obsequiously to the former, because they do not clash with their pursuits; while they, at least practically, disclaim the latter, because they condemn their licentiousness. But let such Christians know, (if still they deserve the name of Christians) that their efforts to shake off and rid themselves of the yoke are useless and unavailable. Serve they must, in spite of opposition. If they refuse to acknowledge God, they must be tributary to Baal. If they are not subjects of the law of grace, they must be slaves to the dominion of sin.

If therefore you wish, brethren, to be free from apprehension, fulfil the divine law in every article it prescribes. Let your obedience be
X
universal.

universal. The fewer exceptions you make, the greater ease will you experience : as, by a contrary rule, the more indulgences you allow yourselves, the more perilous your risk. For example, you make light of that censoriousness, which habit has inured you to. Perhaps, in regard to their object, your slanders may not be mortal. But is it not to be feared they will gradually pave the way to more serious transgressions ? Unimportant in themselves, they become weighty in their consequences.

Thus, your distractions in the time of prayer, by degrees, produce indevotion and a disrelish of things spiritual. That hastiness of temper gives birth to the fallies of passion. Those secret animosities end in open and avowed enmities. For the truth of which we have the assurance of the Holy Ghost : we have the word of Jesus Christ ; we have the testimony of experience. All of which concur to prove how zealous you should be to observe the divine law in its lesser points, if you desire not to infringe it in its more essential and solemn dictates.

Finally, dear people, that our fidelity be perfect, it must be durable and constant. Had our Redeemer promised a crown to such, as are entering on the path of virtue, how many might pretend to it ? But no. Christ has told us positively that his Father does not regard the warmth of the beginner : that he will only pay attention to our constancy and persistence : and that whatever good we may have done, we are not to look for his happiness, unless our obedience be permanent. *He, that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.* Matt. xxiv. 13.

What a comfort, my friends, to be assured that a few moments patience will open the gates of heaven to us ! Was the fidelity, God exacts, to render our mortal state a thousand times more laborious ; still, this life being so short, and eternity so near, why should we be solicitous for the one, which passes so rapidly, and neglectful of the other, which will never never end ?

Reflect, I pray you, often Christians, on these serious and important truths. *The enemy* is ever watchful to *sow his tares* in your hearts : be you ever attentive therefore to defeat his designs. Whatever degree of virtue you may have already attained to, you are still very far from the perfection, you should aim at. Whatever obedience you may have paid to the divine law, there is still room for merit, by a stricter observance of it. Whatever efforts you may have used to secure your election, it is still an unfinished and incomplete work. To die like the Saints, your watchings and your labours must only end with life.

How happy will you be, if, at the critical moment of your departure, your conscience shall bear testimony that you have finished your course piously, and uniformly trod in the path of God's commandments ! When the Deity, pleased with a triumph, the effect of his grace, and of your courage at the same time, shall say to you as he did to Abraham, *Now I know that thou fearest me :*

Gen.

Gen. xxii. 12. *and because thou hast done this thing ; because you have left nothing unattempted in my service, I will bless thee ; I will heap my choicest favours on you ; I will make you ample amends for the violence, you have done yourselves ; and you shall own that, if I insist on being served as a God, I know how to recompense you in a divine and god-like manner. Wherefore, let us henceforth be exact, my brethren, in complying with his law ; since, not content to reward us on earth, he will immortalize us in heaven. Amen.*

X 2

THE

T H E
TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY

After P E N T E C O S T.

On Peace of Mind.

Be of good cheer, thy faith hath made thee whole.

Matt. ix. 22.

HAVING already entertained you on the articles of faith and death, two subjects, the present gospel exhibits to our view, I mean here to lay before you, Christians, the consideration of those gracious words, which our Redeemer addressed to the woman, that applied to him so respectfully.

Thy faith hath made thee whole, he says ; thou art cured ; depart in peace. Here we see verified that oracle of the Lord, announced by the prophet Jeremy ; *return to me, and I will receive thee*. Jer. iii. 1. This distressed and afflicted female sought eagerly for her Saviour ; and he repaid her pious efforts by casting an eye of pity on her, and telling her to *be of good heart*. As she was fearful, says, St. Chrysostom, Christ begins by encouraging her. He calls her his daughter ; because her faith fully entitled her to be ranked among his children. He pours into her soul the balm of heavenly comfort, and dismisses her in peace. How happy should we be to hear the like assurance from him ; *thy faith hath made thee whole* ; depart therefore in peace, and be healed of thy infirmity.

Shall we never, my dear friends, have such a faith, such an humility, such a compunction for our sins, as to become the children

children of God; and, in that glorious quality, to be free from all uneasiness, and possess a true peace? No, I tell you, you never will enjoy that tranquillity of mind, in which alone consists the happiness of life, until you be at peace, first, with God; secondly, with every neighbour; and, thirdly, with yourselves. Only lend a due attention to the discussion of these points, and you will need no further inducement to make you desire to be at peace. But, first, let us implore that assistance from above, which alone can guide our steps to the knowledge of true wisdom.

Informed by the light of reason, and still more by fatal experience, St. Augustine calls aloud to us; cross the seas, travel the world over, go where you will or can; if you look for any thing but God, be sure of being unhappy. You will meet with nothing but anxiety. For thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord! continues this holy penitent, nor can our heart be at ease until it rest in thee. And this, my brethren, is one of those truths, that our own reflection attests sufficiently. For to draw the character, in brief, of the person, that relies on God: he is a man, who, submissive to the orders of providence, has no other will but that of his almighty Creator; and who thus erects his peace on a solid and sure foundation. The master of his passions, he envies no one, because he is as indifferent about his own elevation, as that of other people. Misfortune does not discourage him; because he considers it, sometimes, as the scourge of justice; at other times, as the work of mercy; always, as the effect of a will, which is the measure of his own. He fears not the failure of his future expectations; since God is his security: nor does he value the loss of present things; since his heart is not attached to them. The alteration of his circumstances has no influence on his felicity; nor does the chill of adversity damp his quiet and content of mind.

But, reverse the case, my friends. The grace of heaven once forfeited, peace will quickly disappear. For *who can have peace with God, says Job, that resists his holy will?* Job ix. 4. Satan, the enemy of tranquillity, takes advantage of the opportunity to spread uneasiness and trouble. *Hadst thou hearkened to my command,* says the Almighty to his favoured people, *thy peace had been as a river, and as the waves of the rolling sea.* Is. xlviii. 18. And in another place, addressing himself to them by the mouth of the prophet Baruch, enquire he says, no longer, Israel, why thou art grown old in a strange country, in a land of servitude: thou hast forsaken me, the source of happiness. *If thou hadst walked in the way of God: if thou hadst served me, as I desired, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace for ever.* Learn where is wisdom, therefore, that thou mayest find out true peace. Baruch iii. 11.

Happy then the man both for time and eternity, Christians, who makes it his study to bow implicitly to the will of heaven. Nothing can discompose him. If God be pleased to strew his way with crosses;

crosses, either by the malice of enemies or the casualties of life, he receives them as the trials and experiments of his fidelity. If he threatens him with the sword of unmerited persecution, instead of complaining, he makes it the subject of his joy. If his endeavours to push his fortune, or procure a maintenance for his family prove unsuccessful and abortive, he only takes occasion from it to bless the Lord with redoubled ardour; firmly persuaded that whatever be the event, it is more for his advantage than the most favourable issue. Determined, as he is, to acquiesce in the will God, his contentment and happiness is beyond the reach of accident.

Do you desire then, dear people, to be at peace with your Sovereign good? Besides this resignation, so necessary to the acquirement of it, two other conditions are indispensably requisite: first, a hatred of sin; secondly, a resolution and purpose of avoiding it. I say a hatred of sin. God and sin are irreconcilable opponents. He, who sides with the one, is at enmity with the other. Are you the slaves of sin then, brethren? If so, you belong not to God. You are at peace with Satan, whose works you accomplish: you cannot be at peace with God therefore, whose orders you disobey. The oracle of Christ is explicit; *no one can serve two masters*. Matt. vi. 24. Wherefore, if you would be at peace with the Deity, begin by hating sin. If once you hate it cordially, you will soon lose all relish for it. And thus, disengaged from every vicious attachment, you may confidently hope to be at peace with your God. Let us next see the means of preserving it with our neighbour.

To be satisfied that peace with our fellow-creatures is essential, we need but reflect on what the gospel tells us of it. Would you know, says our Redeemer, how the world is to judge of your affinity to me? If they see that you love and cherish one another; *by this shall men know that you are truly my disciples*. John xiii. 35. Peace and philanthropy are the characteristics of my children: these shall distinguish them from the Offspring of the world, who place their delight in contention and rancour. To unite us with the cement of this amiable concord, Jesus Christ *has made a kingdom* of all that bear his name.

In the infancy of the Church, the whole collection of the faithful had but one heart and one soul. But how very rare, alas! is this happy union at present! This, nevertheless, is the mark we should aim at; or in vain do we pretend to the peace of Jesus Christ. Hence the learned Origen remarks, that the Son of God imparted his peace to the disciples in the evening only; *when it was late, and the doors were shut*. John xx. 19. And the reason he gives for it is, that in the morning, and at mid-day, they were probably dispersed; but in the evening they all met to present their supplications. Whence he infers, that if Christ only gave his peace to the Apostles, when they were assembled in a body, although their separation was in no regard criminal, we are by far less fit to receive it, when,

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for the sake of some paltry interest, we violate that harmony which should unite and conjoin us.

Do not however imagine, brethren, that an unalterable state of peace is attainable here below. Living, as we do, in a world, where people's tempers are so various, it is hardly possible never to feel the heat of anger and impatience. But if we obey the laws of Christianity, so as to suppress all such emotions, we shall still fulfil our duty, and retain the peace of Christ. And this, doubtless it was, that made David say with such confidence; *I maintained peace with them that hated peace.* Ps. 119. In explaining which words, St. Augustine tells us, the wheat must bear with the chaff, until the corn of the Lord be winnowed. While on earth, we cannot avoid being blended with the wicked. Heaven alone is free from the intrusion of their society. Nevertheless, the great Apostle, who was perfectly sensible of our condition, exhorts us to do our utmost to preserve peace with all mankind. On which occasion he uses this remarkable expression, *if it be possible*; Rom. xii. 18. i. e. notwithstanding all the difficulties, leave nothing untried to maintain this lovely concord.

For this purpose I will set before you the example of St. Monica, in which the married, in particular, may find their edification. Monica, the mother of the celebrated St. Augustine, herself of a mild and pacific disposition, had every thing to suffer from the violence of her husband. But with what a laudable discretion did she not manage to preserve peace; by opposing an unruffled meekness to the most outrageous bursts of passion? Did you but act in this manner, friends, we should soon see those dissensions, which at present are so usual, give way to domestic peace and the blessings of tranquility.

For, dear people, in short; if charity reigns not among you, as it ought to do among men, who make a boast of being Christians, lay the blame on yourselves, and your want of indulgence to one another's failings. A little condescension would appease, or rather would prevent those misunderstandings and quarrels, that so frequently disgrace you. Instead of which, you feed them by the indiscretion of your behaviour. For instance, there is a person you have a particular dislike to: you are conscious, that by exposing, you shall anger and provoke him: was charity your guide, so far from saying any thing that might possibly give him offence, would you not rather be studious to stifle all such sallies? Your husband is prone to passion; and experience informs you, that when he is in anger, he spares neither you, nor the Majesty of his God: yet, notwithstanding this, you are so rash as to attack him. But he is a vile wretch, you urge, who spends the earnings of our common industry in rioting and drinking. It may be so. But can you think this plea sufficient to justify your conduct? He has already committed one fault; and must you be the occasion of his committing many more? Because he is to blame, must you be so too? Are we not permitted then to reprove

reprove such as act unbecomingly? Undoubtedly you are; and in a former discourse I have shewn you in what manner to accomplish it. It must be done however, as I there told you, with a discreet and wary prudence. Wait for a proper season therefore to represent your husband's fault to him. The loss of his money has made him fretful: the heat of the liquor has inflamed his blood: in a word, he is in no condition at present to listen to your remonstrances. Thus, dear Christians, if you wish effectually to secure your welfare, neglect nothing to preserve peace, first, with your God, and, secondly with every neighbour; and from this two-fold peace will spring a third, that will make your lives as happy as our condition will admit of.

Reason itself tells us, that when we are at peace with God and man, nothing is wanting to complete our bliss, but to be at peace within ourselves. This is that peace of conscience, which puts the last seal to our mortal felicity. The person, who can truly say this watchful monitor does not reproach him, is as tranquil amidst the stir and busy tumult of the world, as the ark amidst the fears and awful terrors of the deluge. Now he, that is at peace with his Maker and fellow-creatures, must necessarily be at peace with the conviction of his conscience. And, according to St. Augustine, the reason of it is this; viz. that true peace is nothing else but an obedience, regulated by faith, under the direction of God's law. When we are at peace with the Deity, our whole interior is a calm; our passions are subjected to our will; our will to reason; and our reason to the eternal dictates. This peace, which *surpasseth all understanding*, Phil. iv. 7. protects our feeble hearts; and, like the exterminating Angel, at the entrance of paradise, is ever at their gate, to keep off sin and its attendants.

Shew me, my friends, the man who has cause to be fully satisfied with the testimony of his conscience; who, in the retrospect of his past years, discerns nothing grievous that tarnishes their candour; who can affirm with veracity, that he has uniformly trod in the footsteps of the virtuous; shew me, I say, this man, and I shall not hesitate to assert that he has not only within him the principle of peace, but true peace itself; and that there are no consolations to equal what he enjoys.

Nor imagine I exaggerate in this description of the soul, whose conscience makes it no reproaches; and which, in consequence thereof, possesses a true peace. No, I do not speak of a St. Paul only, who, defied all creatures to disturb his tranquillity. Neither do I speak solely of the martyrs, who, by a miracle of grace, experienced this peace sensibly in the midst of all their tortures. But I speak of every Christian that is faithful to his God in the observances of virtue. Yes, dear people, such would be your own lot, were you careful to preserve your innocence, or, if lost, to recover it by a speedy conversion. Such are the great advantages of adhering to that law, which you have taken for your guide. And an inestimable

mable law it is, my friends, of which we may say truly what Solomon said of wisdom; *all good things came to me together with her.* Wis. vii. 11.

How then does it happen, Christians, that so few of us experience this greatest of all blessings? Because, instead of being observant of the precepts of reason, we consult only our passions, which are subversive of all happiness; which prompt us to avoid what is good, and incline us strongly to every thing evil; which incite us to love what we should hate, and make us averse to what we should cherish. Hence, says St. James, the inquietudes that torment us. *Whence contentions among you? Come they not from your concupiscences?* James iv. 1. Instead of submitting our will to the will of our heavenly Father, we preposterously desire that he should accommodate his to ours. Instead of trying to please and content our great Creator, we endeavour to please the world and gain its good opinion. What more, in fine, shall I add? Instead of seeking the peace of Christ, which enlivens the heart with joy, we court that of the world only, which fills the mind with anxiety. Let us open our eyes to our folly then, and correct the mistake in time. And, if we are studious of our real welfare, let us omit nothing to acquire and maintain this triple peace; first, with our God: secondly, with our neighbour; and thirdly, with ourselves: ever keeping in mind that the latter branch of this peace can only be the consequence of a strict adhesion to the two former.

I dare to hope from that spirit of peace which Christ gave to his Apostles, that there is not an individual among you, brethren, but who is either already in possession of this peace, or, at least, is ambitious and eager to obtain it. But beware of being deceived. The peace, which the Son of God holds forth to his disciples, is widely different from that the world offers to its votaries. No, my dear people, no; the world is not the place in which this contentment is to be found. Be not therefore obstinate in seeking for it there. The Sovereign Being is both the author and guardian of this blessing. Seek it in your God then, who alone is its true centre. By looking for it in him, we shall be sure to find not only peace, but *the abundance of peace*; that invaluable peace, which, after having been our happiness on earth, will be our felicity in heaven; as I trust in the divine mercy we shall all of us experience. Amen.

T H E
 TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY
 After P E N T E C O S T.

O N A V O I D I N G S I N.

When you shall see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, then they, that are in Judea, let them fly to the mountains. Matt. xxiv. 15, 16.

WE are not to think this lesson, my friends, regards only the Jews and the subversion of their temple. For the above menaces being accomplished, it must necessarily be superfluous, was it not applicable to Christians and the mystery of their salvation. Wherefore, to reap the designed advantage from it, we must not dwell on the words, but dive into the instruction our divine Redeemer meant to convey by it; viz. to avoid sin and practise virtue.

To be secure from the perils here mentioned therefore, three things are requisite. First, we must fly; *let them fly to the mountains.* Secondly, we must fly without delay; *let him that is on the house-top, not come down to take any thing out of the house.* Lastly, we must not tarry; much less return to the danger; *let him that is in the field, not go back to take his coat.*

From all this let us infer our obligation of shunning sin, and being diligent in the practice of virtue. *Turn from evil and do good.* Ps. 33. This point therefore settled, my first proposition is, that you are bound to guard against vice at all times; but more especially at the seasons of penance, such as the approaching one of Advent: and my second shall shew the means to accomplish this happy purpose. This is the whole plan, dear people, of the subsequent discourse; to
 complete

complete which to your welfare, unite your prayers with mine through the mediation of the Son of God.

Although the obligation of avoiding sin be universal, without exception of place or time, nevertheless, it is true, that we are bound to redouble our care on the days assigned to penance. And, to this end, we must put in execution the advice of the prophet *Isaias*, to *break asunder every burthen*: i. e. you, who have abandoned yourselves to intemperance, become sober. You, who have been addicted to swearing, correct yourselves. You, who have injured your neighbour, either in his property or character, make him amends and repair your fault.

And first, Christians, let us examine what intemperance is. It is an excess in the gratification of the sense of taste, by which, not content with what may satisfy nature, we indulge ourselves in eating and drinking beyond the limits of propriety. No vice therefore is more debasing than the one we are now speaking of: since it not only sets a man on a level with the brutes, but degrades him below them; and even carries him so far, as in the language of St. Paul, to make a God of his belly. What a fordid Divinity! Nevertheless, does not experience shew us many, who sacrifice to it not only the slender pittance they have for their support, but their faculties, their conscience, their salvation? Is this to behave like Christians? Is it to act like rational creatures?

Was reason our guide, its light alone would satisfy us of the enormity of this vice, and discover its baneful consequences. But to see the picture of the drunkard, take a view of it as drawn by the hand of the great St. Basil. He is a liar and a blasphemer; perverse and rash; ever ready to betray his friend, and perjure himself; violent to ferocity, and lascivious to abomination. In a word, says this Father, he is a man capable, at the time, of the most atrocious and horrid crimes. But not to go so far, if you think this exaggerated, we may at least affirm, that a man, given to intemperance, is insensible to the calls of duty, and that callous to the concerns of salvation, he wilfully renounces and abjures his claim to heaven; for *drunkards*, says St. Paul, *shall not possess the kingdom of God*. 1. Cor. vi. 10.

Let this suffice to induce those, whose conscience here upbraids them, to our utter detestation of this worse than bestial vice. Let them copy their Divine Saviour; of whom St. Augustine remarks, that during the course of this mortal life, he eat and drank like other people; and was even pleased to give his sanction to the wedding feast at Cana; to shew us, that the only thing blameable on such occasions is excess. But there is another crime still more general; and to which many of you, my friends, as well as others, I fear, are habitually enslaved; that of swearing, I mean, and cursing, which calls loudly for a reform.

Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord thy God in vain. Exod. xx. 7. Who then are they that transgress against this prohibition? Such as
use

use the name of God disrespectfully and unnecessarily: for *him the Lord will not hold guiltless*. Such as swear as positively to the truth of what they are doubtful of, as if they had a full assurance of its certainty. Such as give occasion of sin to others by the oaths they vent in their presence. Such as make use of an oath either to confirm a known falsehood, or with an intention to deceive: for their habit of swearing gives birth to many perjuries. To which number we may add them that neglect to prevent this sin in their children, their servants, &c. since, by not exerting that authority, which the law of God intrusts them with, they become accomplices in the crimes they omit to give a check to. For, *if any one hear the voice of another swearing, if he do not utter it, he shall bear his iniquity.* Levit. v. 1.

Now, what are we to infer from these principles? That we must be ever upon our guard not to swear in vain; and that necessity alone can justify an oath at any time. For observe, brethren; it is possible for circumstances to occur, in which it may not only be lawful to swear, but even conducive to the divine honour. In which light, St. Paul makes use of an oath, when he tells the Galatians; *as to the things which I write to you, behold before God I lie not.* Gal. i. 20. But what are the conditions under which we may be allowed to swear? *Thou shalt swear*, says the prophet Jeremy, *in truth, and in judgment, and in justice.* Jer. iv. 2. *Thou shalt swear in truth*: wherefore it cannot but be criminal to make use of an oath for the ratification of a falsity. *Thou shalt swear in judgment*: i. e. with discretion, and on mature deliberation. *Thou shalt swear in justice*: viz. so as to obtest nothing upon oath that does not tend either to the glory of God, or to the welfare of our neighbour.

Nevertheless, dear people, how many are there among you, who not only swear rashly and without any cause; but even with curses and the most horrid imprecations? The former, from habit, can scarce utter a sentence, without confirming it with an oath; as if they were afraid of being suspected of lying. But let them remember, that if their character for veracity be otherwise unimpeached, they require no oaths to support their assertions; and that no swearing will avail if this good opinion be lost. The latter vow passionately to revenge their injured honour; in this regard, similar to those profligate Jews, who bound themselves mutually to pursue St. Paul to death; in whose blood it would have been better for them had they never dipped their hands.

Happy still, Christians, did the mischief end here. But alas! whither does this liberty, which you indulge without remorse, conduct you by degrees? Oh such of you, my friends, as still bear respect to the sacred name of God! shudder at the word *blasphemy*, which I am here necessitated to pronounce. What! do you dare to vilify your Maker, and utter things injurious to the majesty of his grandeur? Do you know how the Lord himself commands the blasphemer to be treated? *Bring him, he says, without the camp, and let all*

all the people stone him. Was the Deity to require the like satisfaction now-a-days, how many would be victims of this outrageous offence? But, if the voice of God be silent, let the statues of man speak: let the tongue of profanation be bored, as they ordain, and a stop put to such language, as disgraces humanity no less than religion.

A third obligation, brethren, is to make good to your neighbour whatever injury you may have done him, either in his character or property. How general the former crime is, I have already explained on the subject of detraction; and as for the latter, there is, perhaps, no sin more common among the lower orders, than this of thieving, especially in the country. No indeed; we need not go on the road to feel the hand of depredation: we may too frequently at home bear witness to its rapacity. Know therefore, Christians, that when you rob your neighbour's premises, when you take away his wood, his fruit, or any thing else belonging to him, you are strictly guilty of theft, and are obliged to restitution. This is a point, however, that few, I fear, reflect upon; for which reason, I think it my business to remind them of their duty, and warn them of the risk they run.

For, says St. Fulgentius, if they are to be damned, who refuse to assist the needy, when they have it in their power, what doom severe enough for them, who appropriate to their own use, the effects of other people? Let such then among you, friends, as are conscious of this guilt, tremble for their fate. The indignation of heaven is ready to burst over them: nor have they any means to evade it, but a speedy restitution of their ill-acquired goods.

For, be assured, that your thefts, and the same I say of your slanders, will never be forgiven without an adequate satisfaction. This obligation may seem hard, but it is equitable and necessary, being founded on the law of God, and the general interest of mankind. What is it you are doing then, when you omit to comply with it? You are arming the divine vengeance; you are sealing your reprobation. For learn it now, and never more forget it; you may fast, you may shed floods of tears, you may have recourse to the most rigid and mortifying austerities; still all will be in vain, if restitution be neglected. So says St. Augustine, who roundly asserts, that repentance is a mockery if not accompanied with reparation. But from the obligation of avoiding evil, let us proceed to consider the good we are next required to do.

There are three things that cannot be dispensed with at any time; much less at such seasons as is that now at hand. Of these the first is to enter, according to the spirit of the Church, into the sentiments of compunction. The second, to frequent more assiduously the tribunal of reconciliation. And the third, to be more diligent in learning the word of God.

In the first place then, I say, that there are times in which you ought to be more particular in your endeavours to assume a penitential

tential spirit. And this obligation so essential and indispensable, that no excuse whatever can annul or invalidate it.

But in what does this spirit consist you say? Learn it from the prophet Joel: *Be converted with all your heart: rend your hearts, and not your garments.* Joel ii. 13. And St. Paul informs us, that *there is a sorrow, according to God, which worketh penance unto salvation;* the very soul of which consists in the three following heads, in being sensible of the weight of sin, in bewailing sin, and in punishing sin: three points that escaped neither the attention nor the practice of the penitent David. He feels his sin, *my iniquities, as a burthen, are become heavy upon me.* Ps. xxxv. And how great was his sorrow for his sin! I have laboured with groaning: *every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with my tears.* Ps. vi. Nor does it satisfy him to feel and regret his sin. He consents to bear its punishment; strike, O Lord! and revenge thyself; I am prepared to suffer, and am ready for scourges. Ps. xxxvii.

Which of you, dear people, can confidently say, that he is sensible of his sin, that he laments his sin, that he punishes his sin? But, if you are willing to adopt these sentiments, make use of the following means. First; shun every occasion of sin: avoid that drinking-house which has hitherto been your bane. Secondly, turn all your actions and sufferings to the best account. Make a sacrifice of them to God; and, while you are bending under the weight of your labour, raise your hearts to the Deity, and say to him: Yes, my God! I am a sinner, and therefore it is but equitable I should bear the load which thy justice lays upon me. Lastly, unite, as much as possible, the sorrow of contrition with the remembrance of your iniquities; saying with the publican: Sinner as I am, be propitious to me, O God!

Moreover, the spirit of the Church requires you, on these occasions, to present yourselves often at the seat of forgiveness. There is no precept, I own, either of Christ or his spouse, that specifies the time in which this duty is incumbent. Because, neither Christ nor his Church could suppose a precise period, when men, endowed with free will, should infallibly be involved in a state of mortal sin. Neither am I ignorant that the Council of Lateran obliges us to confess our sins but once in a year. However, by that expression, *at least once in a year*, it plainly insinuates its intention to be that we should have recourse to this sacrament much oftner during that space.

Did time permit it, brethren, I have here an opportunity of shewing the many advantages resulting from confession. And to touch upon them lightly, I appeal to your own feelings. Have you not frequently experienced, that the sense of this obligation being at hand, has retained you in due bounds? And, in fact, when you reflect that you must shortly render an account of your conscience to God's minister, are you not disposed to be more careful? Has not the anticipated view of that awful tribunal a secret virtue which influences

influences the whole system of your conduct? At the appearance of vice, an inward monitor exhorts you to check its progress, and avoid the danger. How much would the occasions of your sins be diminished then, were you diligent in this practice? And, on the other hand, what an increase of good works! Your last confession was witness to many pious resolutions; which, if strictly followed up, would long since have fixed your unsteadiness. Hence let us infer that the seasons marked for this purpose by the discipline of the Church, are highly beneficial; that, applying them to her intentions, we may divest ourselves of the old man, and put on the new; and, thus arrayed, be introduced to the solemn banquet of the Christian institute.

Finally, my friends, not to detain you any longer, I conclude by asserting that, if you would act in correspondence with the views of the Church, you must also be more assiduous in studying the will of God, from the dictates of his word. This his spouse distributes with profusion at these seasons. Enter into her spirit therefore: read it with attention, and take every opportunity of hearing it explained. Redouble your ardour; *for the time is short*. Make the most of it you can; and have a care lest you be stopped, and the curtain dropped upon you, before your part be completed, and your conversion accomplished.

Renew your protestations then to avoid all sin in future, and especially, dear people, those, to which you know yourselves habituated. Let your prayers be both frequent and fervent. Be converted in your hearts. Forget your bodies as much as possible, to thing only of your souls, and strive daily to advance in the practice of every virtue; that being victorious over your passions, and laden with good works, you may be duly prepared for a blissful immortality. Amen.

FOR

F O R T H E
H O L I D A Y S.

D I S C O U R S E I.

On the FEAST of the NATIVITY.

*I bring you tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people :
for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*
Luke ii. 20, &c.

Y E S, my friends, Jesus Christ is truly *a Saviour*, not only because he comes in person to redeem us ; but also because he comes to inform us what to do to consummate the great work of our salvation, and to give it that perfection, which the Deity requires. For, if he deigns to take upon himself the redemption of lost man, it is not with a view to set him at his ease, and exonerate him entirely from the burthen laid upon him. If he vouchsafes to contribute to it, by the aid of his mediation, it is nevertheless his will that we should strive to complete it by the industry of our own exertions. Let us hasten then to Bethlehem, Christians, there to complate this Infant-God. How full of rigour and severity are the lessons, he there teaches ! But how invitingly tempered likewise with insinuating unction ! No long reasonings does he here make use of, no studied harangues, no ingenious subtilties. He shews himself, and that suffices.

We were to be instructed and encouraged : both which points he effects most admirably by his Incarnation. Tell us not that you want a light to conduct you into the way of safety : such a plea is inadmissible,

inadmissible, when the example of this babe directs you. Say not that you want resolution to espouse the cause of virtue, when this same example stimulates you. For the Son of God in this respectful mystery serves us both for a model and a motive: a most perfect model, to trace to us the path, in which we ought to walk; a most cogent motive, to engage us to enter upon it. These two heads, brethren, I mean to expatiate on to-day, after having welcomed him among us, by a fervent address to his sacred person.

It must be our own fault solely, dear people, if we have any difficulty to find out the track, that leads to happiness; since our new-born Saviour vouchsafes to indicate it to us by his heavenly example. Such is the doctrine delivered by St. Paul in his Epistle to Titus; *the grace of God, our Saviour, hath appeared to all men, instructing us.* Tit. ii. 11. In which words he shews that Jesus Christ is the model, proposed for our imitation. A *visible* model; for he has lived amongst us: an *infallible* model; for he is God: an *universal* model; for he *hath appeared to all men*: in fine, a *necessary* model; for it is only by walking in his footsteps that we can be brought to the *expectation of his blessed hope.* Ib. 13. Each of these circumstances claims your attention and your gratitude, my friends.

Our divine Jesus then is a visible model, I say; because he has manifested himself evidently and palpably, by dwelling with us. In addition to which, I moreover remark with St. Augustine, that it was necessary it should be so; since man can only imitate what he sees. The Christian, it is true, should be guided by the light of faith, and not blindly led by the impression of external objects. But man is man; and his judgment must ever be regulated by the influence of his perceptions. Now God, in the brilliancy of his glory, does not affect our senses; for he is a light not to be perceived by the eyes of the flesh. But, O the depth of his divine mercy and mysterious wisdom! He veils himself with a borrowed form to become visible, and veils his sacred nature with the grossness of our mortality. He conceals himself so effectually, as not to overpower us with the splendor of his Majesty; and he discovers himself so fully, that we may with ease trace his steps. He is eternal, and time attests his birth. He is invisible, and our senses acknowledge him. He is a pure spirit, and yet cloathes himself with the material substance of a human body.

The present festival, my brethren, bears witness to the accomplishment of this grand mystery; the solace of the Christian, and the confusion of the Jew. These confessed that the Messiah was to come, and direct them into the path, in which they were to walk. But, on the other hand, they obstinately persisted to suppose this path to be a road of worldly grandeur and magnificence. However, their expectations prove vain: for the oracle is fulfilled, and the plan of heaven executed according to its original design, in defi-

ance of their hopes. As to the nature of this design, the Son of God had not hitherto explained it so satisfactorily; having reserved that point for his personal appearance among us. But now, he will have the stable, in which he was born, to be made the school of our instruction; and here, stigmatizing the pomp, the opulence, and the sensuality of the world, he shews as a rude and unpleasant prospect, and commands us to follow him. Wherefore, if we are desirous to reach the goal of happiness, let us model our comportment by his, and we shall be sure to obtain our wishes.

For who, dear people, is it, that here offers us his guidance? It is the Most High, the Supreme Being. *The grace of God hath appeared to all men*, says the Apostle. What further assurance can I wish for to tranquillize my fears? It is a God, who informs me, by his own example, of the conduct I must observe. What have I to apprehend then? Can I be mistaken or go astray, while I tread in the steps of a God, incapable of error, the eternal wisdom, the truth incarnate?

Let the world exclaim against the roughness of the road, which this Infant-Deity marks out. For my part, I will never abandon it. Yes, my God! when the winds of temptation roar; when the suggestions of the common enemy assail me on every quarter; it is my consolation to reflect that thou dost deign to lead me through these disagreeable and painful ways: that I am pursuing the track, which thou discoverest to me: in short, that I am walking in the path, which thou hast chosen for thyself: a path secure, although unpleasant; and unerring, although rugged.

Be pleased moreover to observe, my friends, that, in this stable, we have not only an invisible and infallible model, but also a general and an universal one. *For the grace of God hath appeared to all men, instructing us*. Do not imagine that the solid lessons of his manger are intended for some particular persons only; for such classes among us, as his directive wisdom has consigned to silence and obscurity. No, Christians, no. They are calculated for every rank, and it would be a gross delusion to think the contrary. I am not ignorant that the difference of circumstances is very great in life. However, as in this diversity of conditions there is only one common end, *viz.* salvation; so no one can obtain that end, but by a perfect conformity with Christ, the general archetype. And this it was he aimed at in being born in a state of humility and indigence; that the high as well as the low, the rich equally with the poor, might find matter for their imitation, in copying his example.

Without altering the rules of his Providence, which has its views in heaping wealth on some, while penury and wretchedness are the portion of many others, this new-born Saviour exhibits a pattern to every state. For what, says St. Paul, does he mean to teach us, when he inculcates the obligation of renouncing the
love

love of the world? Only to acquaint us that we must abjure all disorderly affections, which corrupt the heart, by attaching it to the honours, riches, and pleasures of this life; that we must *deny ungodliness and worldly desires*. Tit. ii. 12. Whereas, this disengagement of the heart is by no means incompatible with the actual enjoyment of these same things. To be convinced of which, let us still keep our station at the instructive manger of this infant, and attend to the events that accompany his birth.

For observe, brethren, this God, so contemptible at present, if I may say so, and so wonderfully degraded, does not forget his dignity nor his dues. Although unknown to men, he assembles the celestial choirs about about his cradle. Not content with the homage of heaven, he likewise calls for that of the earth: and humbled, as he is, he knows how to make the world sensible of his importance; and that not only in the most distinguished of its inhabitants, but to the extremity of its limits also. Already three princes, by divine inspiration, forsake their country and their thrones to seek and to adore him. Although he enforces poverty by his example, he does not refuse the gold, which they present him with, in testimony of his Sovereignty. Averse, as he is, to luxury and parade, he permits them to burn their incense, in acknowledgment of his Divinity. His crib becomes his throne; his cradle his palace; every thing around him proclaims him to be the Son of the Most High; and notwithstanding the partial sacrifice he here makes of his supreme grandeur, he still retains the rights, that are due to him, as the Lord of nature.

Hither then I invite you all, my friends, without distinction or reserve. In this infant, the model of all, all will find the grounds of their instruction and improvement. Ye poor! draw near to his manger; and here learn to be satisfied with your condition, to suppress your murmurs, and to stifle all impatience. If you be but docile, and observant of his lessons, this necessitous and debased God will convince you of the happiness of your state: he will teach you that, to submit to the difficulties attending it with a christian spirit, is the road to heaven, and that, having completed your course of sufferings here, you will be translated to an endless felicity hereafter. Ye rich! come ye hither also, and you will learn, not to relinquish your earthly wealth, but to make a proper use of it; to possess it without permitting it to engross your affections; in the midst of your opulence to acquire, by degrees, that poverty of spirit, which is essentially requisite to your future well-being. In short, Christians, whoever you be, repair to the stable, that contains this God incarnate, to be instructed in the science of salvation. The example of your divine Preceptor is universal. Whatever side you view it on, in his adorable person, you will find your information. For he is not only a visible, an infallible, a general model, as you have now seen; but he is also a necessary one; and that

to such a degree indeed that, unless we copy him as nearly as possible, our expectations of eternal bliss must inevitably fall to the ground.

I own, dear people, I cannot but be struck with dread, when I reflect that the rule of conduct, held up by Jesus Christ, is so essential to salvation that every other direction leads to misery unchangeable. But the oracle of his holy scripture tells us positively that in him alone we are to seek our security: *for there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved* Acts iv. 12. The wailings of his cradle, says St. Bernard, proclaim what the example of his life was to confirm. Here he publishes aloud that he is the way; and that none, but such as follow him, shall be admitted into heaven. Here he informs us that he is the gate; and that if we refuse to go in by it at present, it will be for ever barred against us. Here he acquaints us that he is the truth; and that all, who neglect to listen to him, shall become the dupes of error and delusion. Here, in fine, he cries out that he is the life; and every thing else is fraught with death. From all which let us conclude that from his very cradle he condemns the world, which pursues a different road, and professes itself an open enemy to his dictates. No other option then is left us, but either to perish with the world, by loading ourselves with the maledictions, which this heavenly Saviour already vents against it; or to save our souls with Christ, by making choice of the way, he takes the pains to indicate to us. For most assuredly, if we forsake the company of his chosen party, we shall have every thing to apprehend from our obstinacy and contempt.

And in fact, my friends, whenever you cease to regard this infant as your model, and to follow his injunctions, there is nothing so alarming but you may have reason to live in dread of it. For what greater wilfulness can there be? Our guide shows us the road, which alone conducts to happiness; yet we despise his directions, and prefer a way, which he assures us, will terminate in our ruin. What can we allege in justification of such a conduct? Does not Christ, by being made man, plainly intimate that the commands, he lays upon us, are within our reach? Can we expect that he will frame a different code of laws for us? or hope that he will judge us by any more favourable maxims hereafter, than those he teaches us to-day? No, dear people, it is not possible it should be so. His decrees are immutable: he will abate nothing of what he now exacts; and, if you do not choose to copy his divine pattern, be persuaded you will never reach that seat of immortal glory, to which he desires to conduct you. Let us see, in the next place, how far he serves as a motive to encourage us on our journey.

The path of salvation, marked to us by our Saviour in the cradle, is certainly difficult and rugged, because it is a road of mortification and self-denial. Nevertheless, we ought not to be disheartened at its apparent roughness, when we behold our Redeemer himself

himself leading the way through it. His appearing in our flesh is a sufficient motive to excite us to undertake and suffer every thing. Upon this head likewise I will make four short reflections. Who then is it that sets us the example, in the stable of Bethlehem, of the deportment required of us? First, it is a God, who is infinitely superior to us. Secondly, it is a God, become man like ourselves. Thirdly, it is a God, brought down to a condition more indigent than ours. Fourthly and finally, it is a God, reduced to this wretched state, without the obligations of submitting to it, that we have.

First then, I say, it is a God, infinitely superior to created nature, that here vouchsafes to shew us our duty by his own example. The ancient Pagans made a merit of imitating the Deities, to whom their fictions had given birth. Whence St. Cyprian styles the vices of their imaginary Divinities *consecrated vices*, which their deluded votaries copied on motives of religion. We are desirous to resemble such as move in a higher sphere than ourselves, and whether it be from views of interest or policy, we make it our boast to walk in the footsteps of the great; and, although we frequently go astray by so doing, still we hope that the witnesses of our errors will deem us the objects of their pity, rather than of their censure.

What an astonishing assurance then for worms of the earth to refuse to adopt the plan, which the infinite majesty of their God has taken the trouble to delineate for them! How deplorable to see Christians, marked with the blood of the mystic lamb, lifted into his service and enrolled under his banners, unwilling to take up the arms, which their commander himself makes use of against the enemies of their souls, and shrink at the humiliations, that he embraces freely to promote their eternal welfare! What an intolerable impudence, says a holy Father, speaking on this subject! Can any punishment suffice to expiate the guilt of it?

But if it be a God, you will reply, that leads the way, he has strength sufficient to surmount the difficulties, that may occur: he wants no other aid to triumph over the obstacles of this weighty undertaking than his own omnipotence. Yes, brethren, it is a God, infinitely superior to, and infinitely more powerful than you: but I must add moreover that he is also a man like yourselves, who suspends, as we may say, the prerogatives of his divinity, to shew us only the weakness of our humanity. He possesses nothing more than you do. The desire of his Father's glory animates him; and the like desire must encourage you. The zeal of your salvation inflames him; and the like zeal should consume you. Grace supports him; and it depends solely on yourselves to experience its efficacy, and to follow its impression.

What excuses can you offer to palliate your frequent murmurs at the poverty of your condition? To stop them, shall it not be enough to hold out the example proposed to you in the mystery of this day? the example I say, of a God, still poorer than yourselves. Let us return again to Bethlehem; for it is there, worldly wisdom!

that thy reasonings are confounded. The palace, Jesus chooses for his birth, is the harbour and retreat of beasts; while his sole covering and security against the inclemency of the weather are only a few rags, and of them scarcely enough wherewith to clothe and swaddle him. Mary sheds tears at her distressful situation: Joseph cannot help mingling his at the pitiable scene. But, Oh, superfluous and useless tenderness! What is there in all this that does not happen by the secret dispensations of his Providence, which has ordained the whole of this transaction for the welfare of mankind? For, if Christ be born amidst the grievances of poverty, is it not his own free choice that he appears in such a state? How profound, O Lord! are thy judgments! how inscrutable thy ways! What documents here for you, my dear people, to teach you to submit cheerfully to that indigent condition, in which his sacred hand has placed the greatest part of you: and, after the pattern of this divine babe, to embrace with joy the difficulties of a state, which he has sanctified so eminently, by the influence of his blessed example?

In fine, my friends, the person, who here exhibits this complete model of self-denial to us, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had none of the obligations to practise it that we have. For when he enters on this painful course of penury and affliction, he is induced to it only by the two following reasons: first, to make satisfaction to his Father for our sins; and, secondly, to preserve us from any future relapse. You, dear Christians, are obligated, in both these respects, to pursue the steps of this heavenly infant; who, at his birth, points out to you to this way of mortification, as your only remedy for the past, and your sole preservative for the future. For what could incline a God thus to humble, to debase, to annihilate himself, but that we might learn to do so likewise? And, if he has vouchsafed to discharge our debts, does not this his goodness challenge our most sincere and hearty acknowledgments?

Yes, my God! prostrate in thy sacred presence, I own with shame my past ingratitude. Thy example shews me the road I ought undoubtedly to take; and I now determine resolutely on complying with its advice. Must I in future condemn a world, which hitherto I have been too fond of? Dost thou require me to renounce its maxims, so long my rule and law? I will obey the tender invitations of thy cradle. Speak, divine Infant! I am ready: nothing can be difficult to me, whilst I am guided by a God. Complete, Oh adorable Saviour! the work of my salvation, which thou beginnest by this present mystery, and enable me to co-operate with thee in effectually securing it. If, for this purpose, thou must abandon me to the poverty, that now distresses me; to the misery, that pursues me; if thou expectest me to endure the uneasiness and pain, that now torment me; the sickness and affliction, that prey upon me; I am willing, Oh sacred Babe! and resign myself to thy appoint-

appointments ; inasmuch as I shall thereby become more conformable to thee. Only suffer me to remain near thy cradle, and to mix my tears, my sorrows, my humiliations with thine. Give me that simplicity of heart, which is requisite to learn the lessons thou there teachest ; and enable me to adhere so closely to the dictates of thy crib, that by a perfect observance of and compliance with them in this life, I may in the next deserve to be admitted into the mansions of thy glory. Amen.

The Lord of the Church.

D I S

D I S C O U R S E II.

The Feast of the Circumcision.

After eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised; his name was called Jesus. Luke ii. 21.

TH E prophets of the Ancient Testament, foreseeing the grand mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, the sublime dignity of this heaven-sent Redeemer, and the wondrous efficacy of his grace, had previously assigned to him the different names of *Emmanuel*; *the Angel of the great council*; *admirable*; *the Father of future ages*, &c. ; names expressive of the qualities inherent to his sacred person, and essentially united to him from the first instant of his conception. But because he could not be entitled to the appellation of *Saviour* without the effusion of his blood, this he begins to shed for us in the mystery of this day : a day, dear people, in which we celebrate the early exertions of his love for man, by submitting his infant-flesh to the bloody knife of circumcision. O divine Deliverer of our race ! How active is thy charity, which prompts thee so soon to manifest thy design of making, on a future day, an entire sacrifice of this body, for a cause so near thy heart ! Yes, O God ! Thou didst subject thyself to this painful ceremony to teach us that obedience, which thy example recommends ; and to merit, by thy compliance with this sanguinary law, a claim to the name of Jesus, which is here conferred upon thee. That we may experience its virtue, and reap the benefits intended by the solemnity of

of this day, we will now supplicate thy aid, the generous source of all our good.

Circumcision, Christians, was an exterior mark which the Lord prescribed to Abraham, in order that his descendants might be distinguished from other nations: in which point of view, this ceremony contained nothing but what reflected honour on the people, on whom it was imposed. But, at the same time, he made it a sacrament, by means of which, in the opinion of divines, the original stain of their proto-parents sin was done away with their own blood. In this light, the law of circumcision may justly be considered as an institution extremely humbling: inasmuch as it carried with it an undeniable proof of sin. Nay, so strongly tinged does it appear with this foul dye, that St. Luke himself seems apprehensive of relating the circumstances of the mystery now before us; which not one of the other Evangelists has thought proper to give a hint of even. They none of them make any difficulty to inform us that he was scourged; that he was buffeted and spit upon; that he was traduced as an impostor, and crucified as a slave. But they all appear ashamed to tell us that he was circumcised. And why? Because circumcision was the consequence of sin, and a convincing testimony of guilt. Wherefore, as there can be nothing more opposite than sin to the holiness of the Deity, surely his divine Son must have been particularly influenced to submit to a ceremony that was so deeply marked with its impression; a ceremony so prejudicial to the opinion we ought to harbour of his innocence, of his sanctity, of his God-head. Various indeed are the reasons assigned by the ancient Fathers; out of which I will select a few, that may illustrate his intentions; and, in the first place, his wish to extend the homage due to his Almighty Parent.

St. Augustine, in his comments on the Old Testament, remarks, that the first occasion on which the Supreme Being deigns to take the title of *Lord*, is upon the creation of mankind. Whereby he shews, that he looks upon it a greater honour to be the Sovereign of the human race, than of all the rest of his admirable works. What an increase of glory does he then obtain, by becoming the master of his own Son! An increase infinitely more extensive than by being Lord of myriads of worlds. For the more distinguished the persons over whom the sceptre is swayed, the more exalted in proportion is he that manages and wields it. Of consequence, therefore, the crown of the eternal Father must receive an infinite addition of lustre, by having a God for his subject, for his servant, for his slave. *Thou art my servant, in thee shall I be glorified.* Is. xlix. Yes, servant, I say, and slave: for Jesus Christ, in this degrading ceremony, stoops to the condition of the rest of the Israelites; and puts himself on a level with the people whom his Father conquered *with a strong hand*, when he freed them from the tyranny and bondage of the Egyptians.

But

But this is not all, my friends. Our heavenly Saviour, at his circumcision, is not only branded for a vassal; he is moreover singled out as a sacrifice to the supreme excellence of the Deity. For, as the Paschal Lamb, which the law required should be immolated at the Passover, was marked by a particular token to the Sovereignty of God; so was Jesus Christ, whom St. Paul tells us *God had sealed*, branded with the scar of circumcision, and marked as a victim to the omnipotence of his Father, in the name of all the faithful.

Secondly, he is circumcised in compliance with the precept enjoined, as I have already said, to Abraham and his posterity, of which number he was one. *In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will.* Ps. xxxix. 11. How the mystery, dear Christians, here begins to reveal itself? When I open our yearly calendar, and there read, at the very commencement of it, *the circumcision of our Lord*, do I not immediately perceive the accomplishment of this prophecy? Yes, I see that the budding infancy of my Redeemer is distinguished by an act of the most heroic and unreserved obedience. *He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* Phil. v. 8. St. Paul, with the greatest reason, is profuse of his encomiums on this proof of Christ's submission: nor can I think the instance now before us, brethren, to be less deserving of our notice. A public execution is by no means an infallible evidence of guilt: for we know that the most innocent have sometimes been victims to the weakness of mankind. But to be circumcised is an undubitable assurance of one's being a sinner, or at least a descendant of that criminal progeny. It is a badge of disgrace and infamy in the sight of both God and man. He rather chose to lose his life, says St. Bernard, than violate his obedience: to which we may subjoin, that rather than be deficient in this capital point, he made no scruple to forfeit his very honour, a thing dearer to us than the breath we draw. Let us no longer then complain, dear people, of the severity of his injunctions; or pretend to say he is unconscious of the difficulties attending them, because he is unacquainted with the rigour of their obligations: for, from the bright example held up to us in the solemnity of this day, he may justly tell us to *walk worthy of the vocation in which we are called.* Ephes. iv. 1.

Thirdly, my friends, the Son of God is circumcised from a principle of humility. He does not seek to shelter himself from the mortification of this lessening ceremony, under the cloak of human respects. He does not reply: I shall blemish my reputation, I shall sully my character, I shall belie my sanctity by submitting to it. The world may hereafter say: what had he to do with circumcision, that opprobrious stigma of guilt and infamy? He committed no sin himself; he contracted none by his birth. That he committed none in person, although we had no other proof, his age alone is sufficient testimony, the age of infancy and innocence. That he contracted none from his parents, the divinity of his father, and the sanctity of his

his mother, are more ample vouchers. How then did he become infected with it ? Only ulcerated flesh demands the assistance of the lancet ; whereas the sacred flesh of this heavenly infant is undefiled with the taint of vice. It is the work of the Holy Spirit ; it is the production of an immaculate virgin ; it is an holy, a divine, a deified flesh, united to the most sacred and adorable word of God. Why then mangle it, as if mortified ? Humility alone can tell us.

In imitation then of the humility which our Saviour here exhibits ; in imitation of his obedience ; in imitation of the homage he renders to his Father by the effusion of his blood in this mystery of the circumcision, let us learn to circumcise our pride, by lopping off every excrescence of vanity and self-conceit. Let us take up the resolution to be obedient like him, although, if necessary, at the expence of character and life ; and to be ever ready to make a sacrifice of all to his service, the great end of our creation. On these grounds, let us circumcise our hearts, the source of all our misfortunes, by a constant mortification of that innate concupiscence, which the Apostle styles *the body of sin* ; by suppressing the cravings and demands of self-love, by curbing our affections, and retrenching every inordinate attachment that ties us to the world. Let us circumcise our bodies, by denying them that ease and rest, by refusing them those conveniences they so much delight in, and by putting them entirely under the government of temperance. Let us circumcise our senses, by keeping them within the bounds of a christian decorum ; that, as they are designed by Providence to be the vehicles of our temporary comfort, so the proper use of them may also merit for us a share in immortal happiness.

Finally, my brethren, Jesus Christ was circumcised for us ; and to prosecute that plan, which he had formed from all eternity. " He was circumcised," says St. Bernard, " for the same intent, as he was born, and for which he meant, in due time, to sacrifice his life." In short, he was circumcised to be our adorable Jesus.

But why do I appropriate this purpose to his circumcision ; when the same was the drift of all his actions, all his sufferings, his whole existence ? " As often, says an holy Father, as the name of Jesus strikes my ear, my thoughts, and my affections fly to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to Calvary." O eternal word ! why camest thou amongst us ? To be our Jesus. Why didst thou travel, sweat, and labour on this earth of ours ? To be our Jesus. Why wert thou scourged at a pillar, crowned with thorns, and sentenced to a cross ? For no other reason than that thou mightest deserve to be our Jesus.

Whatever might have been the views of Pilate at the time, he came much nearer to the line of truth than he could possibly suppose. His pen, unknowingly to himself, was guided by an invisible hand, and declared the true reason of the death of the Son of God.

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It was customary in those days, at the execution of a malefactor, to affix a label to the gallows, intimating the cause and crime for which they suffered. When Pilate therefore took up his pen to indite the title of the cross, who would not have suspected that he should have wrote down, *seditions, a destroyer of the temple, &c.* ? for these were the offences of which our Saviour stood accused. But no; the Spirit of God does not permit it. He obliges the judge who passed sentence upon him, to attest the true cause of his arraignment and condemnation. *They put, says the Evangelist, over his head, the cause written, this is Jesus.* Matt. xxvii. 37. As if the Holy Ghost had said: are you desirous to know why the word incarnate is here crucified? Because he is your Jesus. Why is he to whom the celestial choirs pay incessant adoration, here insulted and blasphemed? Because he is your Jesus. Wherefore is the God, whose crown is glory, and whose raiment is beauty itself, here disgraced with a diadem of thorns, and exposed in public to shame and nakedness? The only reason, I repeat once more is, because he is your Jesus. *They put his cause written, this is Jesus.*

In this regard, Pilate prophesied, in a manner similar to Caiphas, at the beginning of our Redeemer's passion. So true it is, that the Lord frequently makes use of the interposition of superiors for the manifestation of his will. Pilate, a civil magistrate, unconscious of what he is saying, announces to the Hebrews, to the Greeks, and to the Romans, that the person, executed before their eyes, is condemned to death, because he is a Jesus: this he writes upon his cross, in each of their respective languages. On the other hand, Caiphas, a superintendant of religious matters, acting in his capacity at a council of the Priests and Pharisees, pronounces this decisive sentence; it is meet this man should die. And wherefore? To save the community; that is to say, to be a Jesus to them. *It is expedient one man should die for the people.* John xviii. 14. It is then solely for the love of us, my friends, the Son of God assumes this name, which he sets so high a value on. Blessed be his infinite charity for its exertions in our favour!

Divinity informs us that our Saviour bears four different names, each of which is so peculiar to himself, that it can be applied to no one else. He is the *Son*, he is the *Word*, he is the *image of the Father*, and he is *Jesus*. The three former of these appellations shew the light he stands in, in regard to his heavenly Parent. But the last, which he acquired at his circumcision, by the first effusion of his blood, carries with it no sort of reference either to the Father, to the Holy Ghost, to the Angels, or, in short, to any other being besides ourselves. This sacred name appertains to Man alone. So very great, and, at the same time, so ingenious is his love for us, that he has not only condescended to have our name inserted with his own; as *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, &c.*; but he has moreover contrived so to mix and

and interweave them, that he cannot call to mind the appellation he has assumed, without recollecting that also which is particular to us.

And yet, my dear people, how often do you forget him? Or, to speak the truth more plainly, how seldom do you think of him? He offers up for you the first fruits of his sacred blood; and you reserve for him the dregs of an exhausted life only. He no sooner begins to live, than he begins to suffer in your behalf; while you refuse to pay obedience to him, till broke down by the drudgery of sin. He wishes in that respectful name Jesus, which the Angels adore with tremour, to include and comprise yours; and yet you pronounce it without reverence. Without reverence, do I say? You pronounce it with a disdainful insolence; you blaspheme it; you most ungratefully disown it. Ungratefully, I repeat; and could I declaim upon this subject till the end of time without ceasing, I should fall short of expressing the foul, the atrocious malignity of your ingratitude. This divine Jesus, sets so high a value on your souls, that, although he buys them at the immense price of his adorable blood, still he thinks he pays but little for them; whereas, you sell them to his inveterate enemy for a trifling gain, for a brutal satisfaction.

But, my friends, let us no longer insult the infinite charity of the Son of God. The old year is now concluded. It is sunk, it is swallowed up in the great ocean of eternity; never, never more to be retrieved. Let the criminal pursuits then, the iniquitous schemes, the vicious habits, in which it saw us engaged, be absorbed for ever with it. Let the new year, which to-day is opening to us, be the witness of our reformation, and the advocate of our pardon. Let us now in earnest turn towards our Jesus, and devote ourselves to his service. Let the blessings of his sacred name be no longer lost upon us. Let us imprint it on our thoughts; adoring him in spirit, in the recesses of our interior, and frequently presenting him with all that we have or are. Let us imprint it on our words; often conversing on the things that relate to him, and reciting what he has done to be entitled to this appellation. Let us imprint it on our actions; offering them all to him, and beseeching him to assist us in the performance of our duty. Finally, let us imprint it on our hearts; saying with St. Bernard, "All food appears insipid to me, unless I taste my Jesus in it;" and crying out to him with the prophet, *For thy name's sake, O God! be propitious to my sins.*

Jesus, our heavenly Saviour! who hast promised to grant us all we shall ask for in thy name, behold I have now a petition to present to thy goodness; and this, I say, not only in virtue of thy holy name, but also for the increase and the interest of its glory, viz. that thou wouldst preserve it from being buried in oblivion,
and

and make that appellation ever dear to thy servants. Thy Angel commanded us to call thee by this title, because thou wert destined to save us from our sins: for which reason thou canst not reflect upon it without calling us to thy remembrance; without granting us the forgiveness of our innumerable offences; without directing us, by thy light, into the way of salvation; without giving us thy grace in this life, and eternal happiness in the life to come. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE III.

On the Feast of the Epiphany.

Falling down, they adored him, and opening their treasures, they offered him their gifts. Matt. ii. 11.

ARISE, Jerusalem! and be enlightened. Behold the grandeur and magnificence of the Lord thy God. The star of Jacob has at length appeared, the promised sign of the arrival of *the desired of nations*, of the Messiah, long since foretold and predicted by thy prophets. By the guidance of this novel star, men nurtured in idolatry set out in search of him; and, having found him, prostrate at his feet, they adore him, and confess him by their presents to be their Saviour, their King, and their God. A mystery here, my brethren, that exceeds our comprehension. Those, who have their Redeemer in the midst of them, know him not; while they that live in far distant regions, relinquish every thing to go in quest of him. *How profound, O God! are thy judgments! how inscrutable thy ways!* Some thou hardenest, and to others thou shewest mercy; every preference being still the gift of thy free grace. This benevolent clemency of the Deity, we, my friends, experience in the persons of these three Kings; and it should ever be our study to nourish a grateful sense of the gratuitous choice he has vouchsafed to make of us, in calling us, through them, to the light of his sacred gospel. Let us learn our obligations from their conduct; and examine how it is they seek, how they find, and how they preserve
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their Redeemer Jesus Christ. They seek him then by a prompt and willing faith: they find him by an enlightened and sincere faith; and they preserve him by a durable and persevering faith. Nothing can check the promptitude of their faith: nothing can shock the sincerity of their faith: nothing can alter the perseverance of their faith. Such, dear people, is the plan of my present discourse; and such shall be the subject of your pious attention, after having supplicated, by a short prayer, the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

The behaviour of the Wise-men, on the occasion now before us, evinces beyond a doubt, that the promptitude of their faith was superior to every difficulty. To search for this Infant-Deity, they were obliged to forsake their families and their domestic concerns; and to attempt a *wearisome journey*, at the most inclement season of the year. To find him, they were necessitated to abandon the religious worship of their ancestors, and to divest themselves of prejudices which they had imbibed in their mothers milk. To become his servants, they were compelled to give up the phantoms of human respects, and boldly to adventure their very liberties and lives.

The shepherds, ~~who had the happiness to be~~ the first that were introduced to the presence of the Messiah, went to Bethlehem, it is true, as soon as they were summoned. But then they were in the neighbourhood of that town; ~~in the same country~~, the Evangelist tells us. Luke ii. 8. They had neither fatigue to undergo, nor danger to face. Charmed with the melodious harmony they heard, encompassed with an heavenly light, and invited by the celestial choirs to take part in *the glory of God, and the peace of good men*, how could they refuse to give their attendance at the cradle? Whereas, the three Kings, separated by an immense tract of country, were incapable of reaching Bethlehem without a very great fatigue, and no less a risk. Not to mention, that their inducement to undertake so perilous a journey, was not the invitation of a concert of Angels, but the admonition of a silent star only.

Did not the gospel attest it, who could believe that the faith of these Sages should stand single and unimitated in all the precincts of Judea. Jerusalem indeed is thrown into confusion by the news of their arrival: but still Jerusalem is not inclined to follow their example. She sees within her strangers, who are come from the confines of the east to make a tender of their allegiance to the King of the Jews: but she does not think of going with them, to pay homage to her own Sovereign, although so near her gates.

Nevertheless, my friends, instead of deploring the infatuation of the Israelites, rather let us bewail the incredulity of Christians. Were there ever fewer obstacles in the road to Jesus than at present? Or ever a greater backwardness in looking for and seeking him? These Gentiles set out from far distant climates to offer adoration

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to him; and some of us will scarcely stir to wait upon him in his sanctuary. So far from quitting the occupations we are engaged in, we think it much to drop our amusements to attend his holy service. A convincing proof of our insensibility and extreme want of faith.

To say nothing of the rank and quality of these three personages, who are generally understood at least to have been men in high dignity, let it suffice that the prejudices of their birth and education seem invincible impediments to the work, they had undertaken. Represent to yourselves, idolaters immersed in ignorance, bewildered in error, and confirmed in superstition by instruction, by example, by habit. Yet no sooner does an extraordinary constellation illuminate their hemisphere, than they obey its dictates without demur. *We have seen, and we are come, they say.* Matt. ii. 2.

How heroic their faith! God calls, and they answer. God commands, and they obey, in spite of opposition. For ever blessed be his all-powerful grace: for all powerful indeed it must be to be able thus to draw from the elbow of idolatry the slaves of superstition; to attract from the bosom of ease the favourites of fortune; and to make them the zealous followers of a poor, mean, rejected Deity.

Think, moreover, on the lash of obloquy to which their behaviour lays them open. What must have been the reflections of the public, on seeing them abandon their most important occupations, to go to remote climates in search of an unknown King; and this on no better grounds than the apparition of a star? How would the world condemn a conduct, which to human eyes must appear so weak? Regardless of the shafts of censure however, and despising the opinions of men, they bid defiance to every obstacle and obey the voice of God.

Here, dear people, let us blush at the recollection of our timidity, which has so frequently been a stumbling-block to us. In fact, how often has the fear of the world nipped the buds of your best intentions? How often has this prevented you from breaking the chains of those vices, that have enslaved you so long; and which, to this very day, are a source of grief to your wives and of unhappiness to your families? You wish, you say, to return to virtue; but the raileries of your profligate associates deter and keep you from it. A pitiful excuse, my friends. For not to mention that your conversion may perhaps be the occasion of theirs too; would you not be fully compensated by the consolations of indulgent heaven and the applause of all good Christians? But by the force of human respects, that you experience yourselves, judge of the weighty hindrances these Sages had to struggle with. If now, when the empire of Christ is extended so widely, you find so much difficulty in declaring for his cause, what think you of their impediments, at a time and in a country, that were strangers to his name? For, dear Christians, in spite of bad example, and the great number of rotten branches, that

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disgrace our religion, the edifying conduct of its truly virtuous members stimulates and bears us up: helps, these Kings had not, who walk alone and unsupported in the path of righteousness and justice.

But what sets the intrepidity of their faith in a still brighter point of view is that, to reach the cradle of this new-born King, whose star they had seen, they hazard every thing, their lives and liberties not excepted. At first, perhaps, they might not have foreseen the consequence of their expedition. But, being arrived at Jerusalem, and witnesses to the commotion excited by the rumours of the birth of Christ, they could not but perceive the danger, that threatened them, from the violence of a Prince so jealous as was Herod: a Prince, bent on sparing neither the tears nor the blood of his subjects, to secure himself in a throne, into which he had stepped by usurpation. A faith, less firm than theirs, would have made no scruple to disguise itself under the cover of dissimulation. But they, superior to all politic and human considerations, appear undaunted at Herod's court. They relate to him the apparition of the wonderful star; and announce the birth of Christ, as well as their intentions of paying homage to his person. The alarms of an anxious Sovereign, the disquiets of a troubled city weigh too lightly with them to shake their resolution, or intimidate their faith: a faith so eminently bright, that it shines without a rival in the territories of Judea; and has it many, do you think, my brethren, in the wide extent of Christianity?

Where at present are the persons, that endeavour to find their God at the hazard of their life, their liberty, or even at the risk of any trifling prejudice to their interest or convenience? Yes, you say, we would willingly look for Jesus; but the doing so must cost us nothing. Is this to look for him sincerely? You have lost him by your sins; and to recover him you have no road open, but that of penance and mortification, the very sound of which affrights you. You are exhorted to forsake your dissolute course of life, and to fly from those occasions, which operate as so many baits, to decoy you into vice; to moderate your passions; to put a stop to the scandal of your licentiousness, &c; but in vain. Whatever verbal assurances you may give, you will not follow them in practice. And is this to imitate the Kings, who make a sacrifice of their all, without reserve, for the sake of Christ? Let us next consider the sincerity of their faith in acknowledging and revering him.

The sacred penman tells that, *entering the house, they found the child, with Mary his mother; and that, prostrating themselves on the ground, they adored him.* Matt. ii. 11. Oh! my friends; to how severe a trial is their credulity here exposed! when, in lieu of the pomp and splendour, they might justly expect to see, they find a helpless infant, bathed in tears, swaddled in rags, his covering a stable, his bed a little straw, his throne a manger, his retinue a distressed pair in want of common necessities? What can equal their
surprise

surprise at the silence, the solitude, the universal wretchedness, that pervades his court? Can this, they say, be the personage pointed out by the star? Can this be the Messiah, to discover whom we have exposed ourselves to so many inevitable perils? Is he to be known by such credentials? If he be a King, where is his palace? If a God, where his temple?

Here, as you may see, dear people, every appearance tends to shock them. But the penetration of their faith unravels the whole mystery; and easily reconciles what the prophets had announced concerning the majesty of this great deliverer, and the abject condition, in which they find him. These seeming contradictions make no unfavourable impression on them; because the faith, with which they are animated, unbinds their eyes to the light of truth. They perceive him to be a King, although his kingdom is not of this world: that his court is composed of celestial spirits only, and that the parade of his grandeur, is reserved for a future life. Hence by the very meanness of his present state they know him to be the same God, as the prophets represent in other passages as *not a man, but a worm of the earth; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people.* Ps. xxi. 7. And from their acquaintance with those sacred writers, they do not hesitate to acknowledge him. *They prostrate themselves, and adore him.* They adore him *in spirit*; their outward prostration of the body being accompanied with the inward deference of the heart. They adore him *in truth*; confessing him by their homage to be the true and only God.

Their adoration finished, they present him with their gifts; gifts, expressive of the qualities, they believe inherent to him as their Saviour. And First, they own him for their King, by rendering him regal honours, and paying tribute to him as their Sovereign. *They offered him gold.* By their servile attitude they declare themselves his vassals; and with their gold, they tender their allegiance to him, subjecting themselves wholly to his authority and rule. That authority, which Herod trembles at, as the destruction of his illegal power, these strangers look up to, as the sacred guardian of their rights.

And here, my friends, suffer me to put a question to you.¹ Since you profess to acknowledge and adore Jesus Christ, do you honour him with a sincerity equal to that of the Wise-men? Surrounded with the brightness of his glory, dazzled with the splendour of his miracles, and carried on by the crowd of his votaries, it costs you but little to throw yourselves at his feet. But is the homage, which you render him sincere and truly genuine? Are your passions subjected to him: your inclinations at his command? Does not the ambition of emerging from the state of your obscurity, and glittering in the beams of vanity, wholly fill your desires? Are his precepts to you, as they were to David, indisputable and decisive? Was I to enter into a detail of circumstances, and the morals of the times, how visibly would appear the glaring inconsistency

sistency between our practice and our creed! The preceptor immersed in misery; the disciples busied in shaking off the rags of poverty, in hoarding up riches, and hurrying away their days down the tide of giddy pleasure. Alas, O God! when will they, whom thou hast deigned to call so gratuitously, cease to resist thee; and to be, at least in effect, thy most cruel persecutors? When shall those happy days arrive, in which they shall seek only thee, and sigh for thee alone; and when, having with the three Kings rendered homage to thy Sovereignty, they shall hasten to adore thy God-head, under the veil of our humanity?

In order then to bear testimony to the Divinity of Jesus Christ, behold the Wise-men making to him an offering of their incense. That incense, which heretofore they lavished on their idols, they now consecrate to him as their Sovereign Benefactor: thereby promising to abjure the errors of superstition, and to bend the knee in future to no other God than him.

But take heed, dear Christians. For this is a point you have never perhaps considered with the attention it deserves. What the Wise-men here promise, they engage both themselves and their constituents to perform. They may properly be styled the deputies of the Gentiles. The Son of God calls us in the persons of these sages. They speak; they act in our name. We, at our baptism, made a solemn ratification of the engagements, they entered into; and it is our business at present to fulfil their obligations. For which purpose, we must not only cease to burn incense to idols with our hands, of which there is no longer any danger; but, moreover, we are bound to pluck them from our hearts, where they still find access and encouragement too often.

But to go on. In offering myrrh, as we are told the three Kings did to Jesus Christ, they make an open declaration of his humanity, of his being mortal, and penetrable to the sting of death. Their faith informs them of the cruel separation, that must, in time, take place between his body and his soul. They here conduct, as it were, this body to the grave; anticipating the memory and honours of his funeral. However, the same faith, which acquaints them with the mortal condition of his human nature, apprizes them also of its union with the Deity; and consequently of its being exempt from the horrors of corruption. For such are the qualities of myrrh, with which they here present him, to embalm, and to preserve.

Was your faith as enlightened as theirs, my brethren, you would respect your Saviour's humanity in the acceptance of his holy word. Because it is announced by men, you affect to hold it cheap. But are not these very men the ambassadors of the living God? Because it passes through sensual channels, you suppose it must lose its efficacy. But know that it will ever be a double-edged weapon, piercing to the very inmost soul; a raging fire, which, if not sufficiently ardent to purify you in this life, will consume you in a future

future. Let us proceed, however, to what may be called the finishing polish of their faith; I mean its perseverance, which was incapable of alteration, Christians.

It is but a trifling degree of merit to seek for Jesus, and even to discover him, unless we use an equal solicitude to preserve him when found. Many, St. Jerom says, begin; but few follow up their good beginnings. If the quality of perseverance be wanting to our faith, its being strong and firm will avail but little. No one, say the sacred oracles, who, having put his hand to the plough, looketh back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven. Luke ix. 62. He alone shall be crowned, who followeth lawfully. 2 Tim. ii. 5. The only way to which is to be diligent in the practice of humility, in watching in praying, in avoiding the occasions of sin, and in working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Phil. ii. 12.

A diffidence in ourselves, and a sincere conviction of our own weakness, are the most effectual means to preserve Christ. Consider the behaviour of these eastern Monarchs. Tried as their faith was, and proof to every assault, nevertheless, they seem to shudder for it. No sooner does the Lord admonish them, by a dream, of the perils that await them, if they return to Herod, than without hesitation they determine, in their way homewards, to pursue a different route. They do not reply that their reputation is at stake; that they shall pass with Herod for impostors, desirous either to lull his credulity, or irritate his jealousy. They do not even make use of the plausible pretext, that here offers, of publishing the arrival of their King and God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It is enough for them to be informed, that their faith will be in danger, to make them adopt another plan for their return into their own country.

What a lesson is this for you, my friends! For you, I say, whose far inferior virtue calls for many more precautions! For you, who, having been frequently leagued with sinners, and perhaps associated in their wickedness, have, or at least ought to have, bid adieu to their connexions lately! What a lesson, I repeat, to teach you never more to share your affections with them: but rather, in the sentiments of David, to execrate these monsters of perdition, whose only aim is to sow the seeds of iniquity in your hearts, and to warp you, by their bad example, from every salutary practice! But let nothing, my dear people, deceive you. Remember that the sole condition, on which we hold our lives, is to do good works, to be presented, in our behalf, at the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge. It is written that what a man soweth, the like also shall he reap. At the hour of death, companions, friends, relations, all will abandon you. Your good deeds alone will then be able to befriend you. And have you hitherto been solicitous to lay up a treasure of them? Rather, have you not been wholly occupied in rearing up a vast pile of iniquity, of oaths, of drunkenness, of flanders, &c.? What then remains to do in the little time, you may

may still have left, but to expiate by a sincere repentance the irregularities of your past life; to persist in the virtuous purposes, you have so seriously formed; to renounce not only your sins, but all those occasions likewise, which have so often led you into them?

Divine Jesus! thou bright light, which hast shewn so conspicuously on those, that sat in the shades of death, open my eyes, I beseech thee; augment my faith, and teach me to walk resolutely in the path thou discoverest to me. All my trust is in thy grace. May this make me place my whole strength in thy weakness. Thou art my God, *who hast no need of my goods*: but as thou forbiddest me to appear empty-handed in thy presence; and as I have nothing, but what I have received of thy bounty, give me, I entreat thee, thy favourite disposition, *viz. an humble and contrite heart*, which may enable me to find thee. Grant, in fine, O Lord, both to me, and to these thy servants, for whom I equally solicit it, the happiness of being attracted, like these Sages, to thy cradle; of seeking thee promptly, of finding thee truly, and of persevering to the end with fidelity in thy service. These are the surest means to make us taste that felicity on earth, which thou hast promised to grant in heaven to those, who shall have sought Jesus, who shall have found him, and who shall have faithfully preserved him. Which that we may all do, through his help, is my sincere wish and prayer. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE IV.

The Feast of the ANNUNCIATION.

On DEVOTION to the VIRGIN MARY.

All generations shall call me blessed. Luke i. 18.

THIS prophetic declaration, inspired by the spirit of God, the Virgin Mary pronounces in regard to herself; thereby foretelling the esteem in which futurity should hold her, in consequence of the blessings to be derived, through her means. How far her prophecy has been verified already, the honour paid her uniformly by the Church throughout all ages, sufficiently attests.

The festival of the present day, (consecrated to her honour in memory of the apparition of the Angel, when he came to announce to her the future birth of the Messiah, and the share she was to have in the accomplishment of that mystery) invites us to join, in concert with the rest of the faithful, in bearing testimony to her virtues. If the influence of station can command our respect, no one can be more entitled to it than Mary; on whom the Word incarnate has thought proper to confer the high dignity of his mother. If the palm of merit can claim our applause, no one can have better pretensions to it than this same Mary; whose distinguished desert has obtained so strong a proof of the approbation of heaven itself. Wherefore, to incite you to acquit yourselves with more alacrity of your duty to her, I will endeavour in this discourse to shew you, brethren, first, some of the leading titles, on which she challenges

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our esteem ; and secondly, the chief points, in which our devotion to her should consist. Divine Redeemer ! who hast deigned to take flesh of the blessed Mary, and to trust thy tender infancy to her pity and care, impart to us all a share of her great virtues ; and enable me, in particular, so to paint her accomplishments, as may effectually move thy servants to a faithful imitation of them.

To record the praises of Mary in a manner worthy of her excellence, we will not here compare her to any thing created, howsoever dignified or eminent. No, dear people, we will not confine ourselves to things sublunary and transient ; but will soar up higher, even to the throne of grace itself. *Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.* Luke i. 28. After these words, addressed to her by one of the first among the orders of the heavenly spirits, deputed for this purpose by the command of God himself, all earth-fetched praises vanish. Grace, or sanctity, is one of the most exalted attributes of the Deity, and that which particularly demands the veneration of us sinful mortals. The Supreme Being himself is the author, the source, and the fountain-head of grace ; that distinguishing perfection, which is the sole criterion of real merit. Yet listen, my friends ; the Sovereign Truth itself, by the organs of its messenger, declares that the Virgin Mary is in full possession of this gift ; that the measure of her sanctity is filled up, and that she is replenished with this most sacred emanation of the Godhead. *Mary, full of grace.* What further inducement can we wish for to render her the tribute of our honour and regard ? Or what other commendations can she want, who, we are told, is full of grace ? Such, Christians, is the first motive on which this holy Virgin lays claim to our respect. She is full of grace ; she is fraught with that most noble of all the perfections a rational being can possess.

But this is not all. The Angel moreover tells us, that *the Lord is with her.* In what plainer terms could he have expressed the respectful reverence she challenges ? Her chaste breast, he says, is the seat, the temple, the sanctuary of the Most High. Surrounded with all his attributes, behold here he fixes his abode ; here is the residence of his supreme majesty, of his infinite wisdom, of his boundless power. The celestial spirits, with awful veneration, tremble at his name : and shall we look with contemptuous scorn upon his sacred habitation ? Alas ! dear people, how widely different are our bosoms from hers ! Corrupted by the world, sullied by concupiscence, vitiated by passion, what reception can they afford to the God of all sanctity ? Whereas she, although a mortal like ourselves, was altogether beautiful and spotless ; *fair as the moon, and bright as the sun,* Cantic. vi. 9. The Lord was with her therefore, says the Angel. And why, my friends ? But because she was careful to be always with him ; by living estranged from a depraved world, wholly wrapped up in the contemplation of her Sovereign good.

But

But what, dear people, must our opinion be of Mary, when we see that God makes choice of her, in preference to all other women, to be the mother of his beloved Son? *Thou shalt bring forth a Son,* says Gabriel to her, *and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord shall give unto him the throne of David; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.* Luke i. 32. How elevated the dignity, to which the pious Mary is here exalted! A dignity superior to any thing conferred on the choicest favourites of heaven. What stricter alliance, what closer union can there be than this between the Deity and her? Is it possible to imagine any connexion more near, and at the same time more honourable? God, the great Creator of heaven and earth, the Sovereign, the original, the independent Being, infinite in his attributes, and eternal in his existence, choosing to become man, and to be born in the limits of time, receives his new condition from the blood of the Virgin Mary. Attend, O man! cries out St. Anselm, and listen in silent rapture. The omnipotent and incomprehensible God has one only and co-eternal Son: yet he does not desire to reserve this honour to himself; he shares it with Mary, of whom he chooses he should take flesh. What cause can there be of greater astonishment to us? What subject more pregnant with glory to the blessed Mary? Since, by this singular exertion of the divine bounty in her favour, we see her at once exalted to the highest heavens; in lustre brighter than the Angels, in dignity superior to the Cherubims, in rank next to the Divinity itself.

Let us cease, therefore, to wonder at the unanimity of the Fathers in publishing so loudly the sublime excellence of Mary. Her maternal relation to the Deity, implies every other commendation that can possibly be bestowed upon her; for this, my brethren, is the basis, the foundation of all her privileges. Hence her immaculate conception, her unparalleled virginity, her unbounded plenitude of grace. Hence the greatness, the splendour, the universality of her virtues. Hence those majestic and glorious titles of *Queen of heaven, Mother of mercies, &c.* that adorn her name, and express her merits. "Give to Mary," exclaimed St. Bernard, "the encomiums that are justly due to her: say that she has both found the source of grace for herself, and made mankind acquainted with the happiness of salvation." What degree of reverence, of attention, of esteem, can we think too high, my friends, for so supereminent a dignity as that to which we here see her raised by the eternal wisdom of the Almighty?

But perhaps there are those among you, Christians, who so far from looking on the mother as an object of respect, think but meanly of the Son himself, and the stupendous efforts of his charity. For how can we have a lively faith of his incarnation, a proper sense of his unbounded love for us, and yet continue to insult him, by the commission of wilful sin? However, let such persons

sons know, that whatever may be their sentiments, if they persist in following the dictates of their natural corruption, and in indulging their criminal habits, they will transform this awful mystery which is termed, by excellence, the mystery of salvation, into the source of their reprobation, and a cause of endless misery. For this same Redeemer, Christ, this adorable Son of the Virgin, *is placed for the ruin, as well as for the resurrection of many.* Luke ii. 34. He took upon himself the infirmities of our nature with a view to redeem and save us. But the abuse of his heavenly grace will operate to our perdition. O God! permit not this alarming prediction to be verified in any of us; nor suffer the influence of thy mortal life, which should redound to our happiness, to become the cause of our ruin, and the principle of our damnation.

But to return to my subject, brethren. Although what has been said already be amply sufficient to shew the respect owing from us to the memory of the pious Mary, still there are other motives besides, that tend equally to inspire us with a veneration for her person.

Her distinguished sanctity; the singular privileges with which she was favoured; and the special virtues that graced her character, concur to throw a lustre on her, and to exact our esteem.

We have already heard her declared by the oracle of the Holy Ghost to be full of grace. If this was the case before she conceived the Son of God, how much more so, when she became the parent of him, who is the source of all goodness?

We find her indulged with the extraordinary privilege of being at the same time a mother, and an immaculate Virgin. A privilege as singular, as it was admirable and miraculous.

And as for the virtues which she possessed in so superior a degree, a moment's reflection will be enough to convince us how eminent they were: so eminent indeed, as to shine with a brightness unequalled by any other creature. Only reflect on her relation to the Divinity, and consider what so near an alliance, as that of mother to him must presuppose. God is infinite in purity, in sanctity, in holiness. Can we then imagine, that she, of whom he was pleased to be born, was deficient in these heavenly accomplishments, if I may be allowed so to call them? Rather, have we not every reason to conclude, that all the perfections, of which the human mind is susceptible, were resident in her? Yes, my brethren, it was the fulness of her graces, that the Lord had an eye to in choosing her for his mother; and it was her fidelity in corresponding with these graces, that he recompensed in preferring her above the rest of her sex to this elevated dignity. But the virtue, by which he principally was influenced in making this choice, was her supereminent charity. This is the very soul, so to speak, of all other virtues, without which they are inanimate and lifeless in the sight of God. In short, this is the completion of sanctity; and in proportion as Mary surpassed every other creature in the sentiments of the most ardent

ardent charity, so did she excel them all in the most sincere and genuine piety.

Such, dear Christians, are the grounds of that devotion to the blessed Virgin, which has been handed to us from the earliest ages, stamped with the seal of the approbation of the universal Church. A devotion, which ought to inspire us, in the first place, with a most profound respect for that transcendent dignity of mother of God, with which she has been vested: a dignity, which exalting her above all created beings, has raised her to a throne of glory, the most conspicuous in heaven after that of God himself. Nor fear, my friends, lest the veneration we pay to her person should be, in any sense, injurious to the honour of the Supreme Being. For this principle we should always carry with us, that in revering his Saints, we mean but to respect the gifts, which he has been pleased to bestow upon them; and that, of consequence, when we offer our mite of tribute to the memory of Mary, we only express our esteem of those meritorious qualities, which his bountiful hand has so profusely heaped upon her. So that whatever reverence we testify to this pious Virgin, it must ultimately recoil on God, and terminate in him, as the centre of all perfection.

Secondly, dear people, our devotion to the Virgin Mary ought to impress us with a regard, proportioned to her worth; that sublime worth, I say, which we see her very Maker sets so high a value on, and which induces him to be so lavish in the profusion of his gifts to her. By these gifts she is exalted above all the other Saints; and so exalted, that the Church does not hesitate to style her *the Queen of heaven*. Nor here again be apprehensive, Christians, lest we put the Mother and the Son upon a level in rank. No, we will never honour Mary as a Divinity. We know to draw the line between the creature and the Creator. To the latter only is supreme homage due, whose infinite attributes and sovereign Majesty can alone claim adoration. Nevertheless, we may say with as much truth as piety, that, after God, there is no one in the whole range of the celestial regions so entitled to our regard as his venerable mother. And this he himself has abundantly evinced, by giving her so distinguished a preference in his esteem.

Finally, my friends, it must be our care to render that devotion, which we pay to the holy Mary, advantageous to ourselves. For which purpose we ought to strive to imitate those qualities, that have raised her so high in the estimation of the Lord, and have proved the fruitful cause to her of a happiness without example. It was the assiduous exercise of every virtue: it was her diligent compliance with the calls of heaven: it was her keeping at a distance from sin, and shunning the occasions of it; her embracing all opportunities of doing good, and faithfully corresponding with the graces, she was favoured with, that purchased for Mary such illustrious distinctions. Nor can aught else ever procure any portion of them for her votaries. Look up then, dear people, attentively to her. For there is no state of life, that will not find its pattern

pattern in her example. Are you poor and despised? From her learn to regard your situation as the most favourable and conducive to your future welfare. Are you wealthy and respected? Be instructed by her to avoid the dangers of your condition; to guard against the snares of pride; and to gather from your very rank fresh motives of humility. Let the single here behold the modesty of dress, the circumspection of behaviour, that becomes a christian virgin. Let the married see the regularity of conduct, the fervour of piety, that is required of the matron. We all, in a greater or less degree, are exposed to similar trials, and must face the like difficulties and dangers as Mary. Consequently, our hopes of victory must depend on making use of the same means; that is, on the practice of the same virtues, as rendered her triumphant. Wherefore, let us learn of her to be truly humble, by that unfeigned humility, which she discovers from the beginning. When the heavenly messenger greets her as *full of grace, blessed among women*, and the mother of Jesus, what reply does she make? As if unconscious of her merits, and undeserving of such titles, she terms herself plainly *the handmaid of the Lord*, unworthy of his notice. Let us learn of her those sister-virtues, those inseparable companions, meekness, patience, and resignation, of which every period of her life affords such striking instances. Let us learn of her, who never was defiled with the least spot or stain of sin, to keep ourselves untainted with its malignant corruption. And, above all, let us learn of her the most perfect charity; the most animated zeal in the service of the Deity; and the most enlivened ardour in rendering him the homage of our adoration and praise.

This is the kind of devotion, that will be the most pleasing to the mother of Christ. For nothing but the imitation of her virtues can attest the sincerity of our regard for her. Honour must be founded on love, says St. Augustine. Now what is it to love the Saints, but to conform to their way of thinking; to take their lives for the models of our own; to aspire to that bliss, which they are in possession of; and to pursue the path, that they have traced out to it? To act otherwise, is not sincerely to honour them, continues this holy Doctor: it is to flatter them with lies; it is to pay them a superstitious, a false respect, which they will throw back upon us with disdain and indignant contempt.

Moreover, Christians, this is also the kind of devotion, that alone can be available to our future well-being. For with what face can you presume to look up to Mary for protection; or on what ground can you rest your hopes of her assistance, unless you be solicitous to square your conduct by her pattern? i. e. unless you endeavour to shake off the yoke of vice, she abhors, and to walk by the guidance of those virtues, she recommends by her practice and example. Mary, I acknowledge, is *the refuge of sinners*. But of what sort of sinners, think you? Of contrite sinners, of penitent sinners, of such sinners, in short, as, conscious of their misery, exert

exert their utmost efforts to free themselves from its grasp. Mary is the mother of mercy. But her compassion is not a weak indulgence, favouring vice, and striking at the roots of the divine justice. It is an enlightened mercy, observant of the doctrine of her Son; which, while it supports the sinner in his hopes of pardon, informs him likewise that his pardon can only be the fruit of his repentance and conversion. And this conversion she is at all times willing to implore for us; but on this condition solely, that we join our prayers with hers, and co-operate with her in the grand affair of our salvation.

Let then our devotion to the Virgin Mary be such, as I have here described, dear people. Let us unite with the Church of God, on this her festival, in returning thanks to his infinite bounty for the favours, he has conferred upon her; and which, through her means, he has dealt out to all mankind. Let us endeavour, by copying her manners, to recommend ourselves to the notice and favour of her Son; that we may experience the truth of her prediction that *all nations should call her blessed*. For this purpose, let us solicit her mediation with Jesus, that we may obtain of him, through her prayers, whatever graces and virtues, whatever helps and aids we stand in need of in our pilgrimage: that being sheltered under her wings, and preserved from all dangers, we may at length, by her direction, be conducted safe to heaven, the only seat of security and unalterable rest. Amen.

DISCOURSE V.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

On the Ceremony of the Day.

Remember, Man! that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return. Gen. iii. 19.

THE ceremony, which the Church makes use of on the present solemnity, of putting ashes on our foreheads by the hands of her ministers, is a ceremony, my friends, that speaks for itself. Ashes are the emblems of humility and contrition. In the time of the old law, they made a principal part of the exterior mortifications, to which penitents subjected themselves, when they sought to appease and calm the anger of the Deity.

Sackcloth and ashes, Christians, were the usual resources in all cases of this nature. Nay, so prevailing was this habit among the nations of the East, that we see it adopted by the Ninivites, mere Gentiles as they were, and strangers to the law of God. No sooner had the prophet Jonas, who was deputed for this purpose by the commission of heaven, denounced its threats of vengeance, than instantly, to avert the judgments, with which they were alarmed, the people clothed themselves with sack-cloth, and their King exchanged his throne of royalty for a seat of ashes and dirt. And what was the result, but that they stopped the arm of God, and found the mercy, which they sought for? Many other examples does the scriptures supply us with, that shew their use and efficacy on similar occasions.

Not

Not that of themselves, and by the force of an inherent virtue, the ashes had power to effect a reconciliation between the sinner and his God, (any more than other austerities, if not accompanied with a sincere change of heart) but that the offender, prompted by the sense of his iniquities, had recourse to them, as the means, at that time established, as it were, by custom, of co-operating with the divine justice in the punishment of his guilt.

The intention therefore of the Church in making use of ashes in the ceremony of this day is obvious and plain. We are now, dear people, entered on the penitential fast of Lent. We are arrived at that solemn time, in which we are called upon, like the people of Ninive, to turn from our sins, and to endeavour to pacify the wrath of heaven by a condign repentance. Wherefore, the ashes, with which our foreheads are about to be marked, denote the dispositions, that are required of us at this season; viz: those sentiments of humility and a sincere compunction, which are suitable to the state of suppliant penitents, suing for the pardon and forgiveness of their offences. But let us remember, brethren, that it is not the outward garb alone, not the exterior shew of repentance that is to obtain this pardon for us. The Lord is *the searcher of hearts*; and their conversion solely is the sacrifice, that will satisfy him. *Be converted*, he says, *with all your hearts*, and *rend them and not your garments*. Joel, ii. 12. Ashes, fasts and all other mortifications are but the external ceremonies of the devotion, which is now proposed to us: ceremonies, I say, dear Christians, that will be of very little service, unless we join with them such dispositions of the soul, as may answer the end of their primitive design: that is to say, unless we be actuated by a spirit of contrition for our sins, by an earnest desire of making a due atonement for them, and by a firm and resolute purpose of reformation and amendment. Without these sentiments, my friends, we do but grasp an empty shadow; while the substantial, the real benefits, to be acquired by a proper use of this holy time, entirely escape us.

Moreover, dear people, in this ceremony of the ashes, that are administered to-day, we are taught another serious and equally instructive lesson. I mean the frail condition of our mortal state, which they inculcate most strongly. This admonition is enforced by the words used in distributing them. *Remember, man! that thou art dust*, says the Priest, *and into dust shalt thou return*.

Here we learn our lowly composition, and our speedy resolution into those particles of earth, of which we were primitively moulded. Yes, Christians, whatever advantages we may boast of, whatever accomplishments we may plume ourselves on, still we are dust and nothing more. Dust is the matter, of which our bodies were originally formed; and dust is also the substance, into which they shall be finally resolved.

The mighty Monarch, whose very name spreads terror to the most distant poles, is but dust. The rich and opulent, who are crowned

crowned with every pleasure wealth can procure them, are but dust. The vain and ostentatious, who glitter in the beams of pomp, like butterflies in the rays of the sun, are still but dust. From the palace to the cottage, from the prince to the beggar, dust is our common origin, and dust shall be our common end. Cease then, presumptuous pride! to swell us with the idea of our grandeur and importance. Cease, deceitful world! to tempt us to admire and be in love with thy enjoyments. We are perfectly assured that all thy parade, thy riches, and thy pleasures shall vanish in smoke, and leave us nothing in the grave, but the ashes from which we sprung.

At all times, my dear friends, we should be studious to remember the end we must come to; and to keep in view that inevitable tribute of death, which every child of Adam is doomed to pay at last. Amidst the various occupations in which we pass our days, we ought ever to be attentive to that hour of dissolution, for which alone we live, and on which must depend our unalterable destiny. To prepare for those important moments, should be the whole employment of our lives. But at the time of Lent, which we are now beginning, this business is more urging; since we are now invited more particularly to apply to the great affair of our salvation, and to endeavour to accomplish it by the discharge of our religious duties. For which reason, we are now reminded of our subjection to death, as the most powerful incentive to animate us to pursue with vigour, the short remainder of our course, and to embrace with joy the rigours of this season; which, if accepted in a christian spirit, and performed with a right intention, will tend highly to promote our happiness, and attract the favour of heaven.

Divine Jesus! Author of life, from whom our existence is derived, make us sensible of our transient state, and mindful that we are but mortals, who pass away like shadows, and wither like the flowers which perish with the day. Imprint on our minds a deep sense of our dependence; that we may be ever willing to resign our all to thee, to whom alone we are indebted for it: and grant us the grace to make such use of the austerities we are now called upon to practise, that we may find mercy at thy hands, when thou shalt cite us to thy tribunal. Amen.

D I S

DISCOURSE VI.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the OBSERVANCE of the Fast.

*Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, in weeping,
and in mourning.* Joel ii. 12.

THE time of Lent, which we have now begun, my friends, is a time distinguished from the rest of the year, both by the fast that accompanies it, and the mysteries with which it terminates. For this reason, I have judged proper, instead of moralizing, as usual, on the gospel of the day, to single out such subjects for each of its Sundays, as might be suitable to the occasion. For as instruction is my aim, dear Christians; I could wish to give you some idea, as well of the nature of the time itself, as of its duties and ceremonies. And first, as to the nature of it; since it is a season, in which we are called upon to *be converted* to the Deity, it speaks its own importance. Wherefore, it cannot be amiss to bestow a few reflections on a subject of so much moment.

That the institution of Lent is of very early date, is sufficiently known to all who are conversant in religion. Nor is it a matter less acknowledged, that the fast, which it enjoins, has been received by every nation that has embraced the faith of Christ. The diversity of times and countries, has, no doubt, occasioned changes in it: but these have only reached to some local and inconsiderable differences, dependent merely on discipline and the variety of order. The main point, the essential and constituent part of it has undergone

no alteration, neither as to the length, nor the general method of observing it. So far for its institution.

And as to the obligation of this fast, let it suffice to be assured, that it is enjoined us by the Church, which we know we are commanded to obey without repining. *He that will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen or a publican.* Matt. xviii. 17. On this head I shall say nothing therefore; since, speaking as I am to Catholics, I should presume it would be needless. But I will endeavour, brethren, to shew you first the utility of this solemn fast; and secondly, the manner of keeping it to render it meritorious. For this purpose, let us join in imploring the divine light, which alone must be our guide.

That fasting is a duty, which, when performed in a proper spirit, is attended with great advantages, is not to be denied, without expressly contradicting the authority of the sacred books. The writings of the ancient testament repeatedly make mention of it. They shew that it was in use with the most conspicuous for their piety, under the influence of the old law. And the pages of the gospel confirm in behalf of the new, the commendations so often given to it. Here we behold it practised by that bright model of perfection, our heavenly Saviour. Here we see him fasting forty days and forty nights, in the lonesome solitude of a desert, to which he had retired for this purpose. Here we are told by his own mouth, that all the children of the Almighty Father are to fast during his absence. And, lastly, here we find him condescending to give instructions and rules for the due performance of this article. So great is its importance in the eyes of him who cannot err.

To enumerate the many instances of fasting, and its usefulness, afforded by the scriptures, would be to abuse your indulgence, and trespass on your time. A general view of them which you have seen, is enough, I make no doubt, for your satisfaction and assurance. But I cannot help observing, that from the multiplicity of examples of the good effects of this practice, there proposed to our consideration; no less than from the many testimonies of the sacred oracles in its favour; the Fathers of every period are unanimous in recommending it: and all of them in concert, are strenuous in setting forth the advantageous resulting from the mortification of a christian fast. Hence the Church, guided by the same directive spirit, in her preface for Lent, tells us that fasting *overcomes* and disarms the power of *vice*. And how, dear people? But by confining in due bounds our irregular appetites and desires, the incentives to every wickedness; and by curbing our lawless passions, which give birth to all our evils. In the same preface she informs us also, that fasting *elevates the mind*: inasmuch, as it disentangles our souls embarrassed in the nets of sensuality; which, like a thick and viscid birdlime, glues them to the world; and raises them towards heaven, where, unfettered, they may range at large in the spacious fields of contemplation. In short, the happy consequences of fasting, are universal

universal and unlimited. The wicked and the virtuous, the sinner and the saint, partake alike of its utility. The sinner, I say, is helped by it, as might be proved by numerous instances, were it necessary to have recourse to them. But no; examples are not requisite. For the principles of faith tell us, that nothing so soon excites the compassion of the Deity, as self-accusation; nothing moves him so effectually to put away his terrors, as when the culprit sides with his justice, and exercises a due severity on the wretch that has dared to offend him. The saint likewise, on his part, reaps advantage from this wholesome practice. For, besides that he thus subjects that inbred and mortal enemy, concupiscence, which is ever at variance with his reason, his soul hereby acquires an additional degree of vigour. He is enabled to fly with more facility towards God, in fervent prayer, and to contemplate with a clearer eye, the full extent of his various duties. Now, if fasting, in a general sense, be so salutary and beneficial, can we suppose it to be less so, when made a part of our obligations? Shall we think the fast of Lent is less acceptable to God, when recommended by antiquity, or less meritorious to ourselves, when resting on divine obedience?

To this part therefore, Christians, I mean the utility of this pious fast, I hope nothing further need be added. And as to the manner in which it ought to be kept; the end, the design of this institution will best indicate that to us.

Lent, my dear brethren, as the least acquaintance with it will inform us, is a season of atonement. It is a time devoted to works of penance and mortification; to avert the wrath of heaven, and procure a reconciliation with our long-insulted Maker. The first thing it supposes therefore in all that desire to keep it properly, i. e. according to the dictates of its original intention, is a true and sincere repentance. But in what does this consist? Not only in a virtuous sorrow and compunction for our sins; but in a fixed determination also of renouncing them for the future. This is a condition so essential to the time, that it may justly be deemed its soul and principle of life. To abstain from the use of meat, and yet persist in the habits of vice, is a mockery, and not a fast. It is, in fact, to delude ourselves, and fix a stigma upon religion.

Secondly, Lent being designed as a time of condemnation and punishment, the Christian's duty at this season, is to call himself to a strict account; to search seriously into his soul; and, by a diligent examination, take an impartial survey of the whole state of his interior. This, my friends, is now incumbent on us. And to acquit ourselves of it as we ought, in addition to the fast, we should retire, as much as possible, from the hurry of our avocations. Let such be our practice therefore. Separated from a noisy world, in the solitude of our closets, let us scrutinize our conscience, and pass sentence on our evil ways. If we judge and condemn ourselves, we shall avoid being censured by the future Arbitrator of our fate. And what have we not to dread? The sight of our innumerable and

habitual failings; the retrospect of our past ingratitude, and those enormous offences by which we have insulted our Creator; and, at the same time, the frightful view of the punishments reserved for sin, cannot fail to make us tremble. *Spare, O Lord! spare thy people*; was the prayer of the prophet Joel. And ought it not at present likewise to be the prayer of us all? When we cast our eyes on Christendom, and behold the vineyard of the God of sanctity, become the seat of vice and guilt, can we think ourselves more secure? And to deprecate that justice we have so much reason to apprehend, will this season of rigour and repentance appear unnecessary or superfluous? Oh brethren! let us take the alarm at so terrifying a prospect, and resolve to observe this fast according to the spirit of the Church, and with as great a degree of strictness, as may be compatible with other circumstances.

Thirdly, as the exercise of religious duties should be at all times joined with fasting, another means of sanctifying this season of desert is the frequent use of prayer. Prayer and fasting, are represented in the sacred writings as inseparable companions. To produce their full effect, they should ever go hand in hand. They may, in a mystic sense, be called the two wings of the repenting soul, by the help of which she ascends to heaven, and effects her peace with God. Prayer therefore claims a large share in our present employments; and that especially in regard to those who are masters of their time. And as for the many, who have to labour, and earn their bread by the force of industry, their wants must be their rule. Let them attend to these, in the first place, as duty requires of them. And whatever portion of leisure may remain from their occupations, let it be devoted to this purpose. Particularly, let them be careful to submit to the hardships of their state in a spirit of penance and resignation. This, dear people, is a point, which, although advisable at all times, is more especially so in Lent. Providence has its views in the dispensation of its gifts. But the part of a Christian is to leave the unravelling of its mysterious secrets to its own appointed hour. Instead therefore of murmuring at the decrees of its infinite wisdom, bow down to them respectfully, and endeavour to comply with them. If such be your present conduct, what treasures may you not store up? Your poverty will become your riches, and your toil your degree of merit.

To prayer must be added charity, and a benevolence to the poor, that may open your friendly hands to the necessities of the indigent. *Is not this the fast, that I have chosen? Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the harbourless into thy house, says the Almighty. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear, and give thee rest, Is. 58.* Yes, my friends, if you desire to find mercy with the Deity, you must lead the way yourselves, by shewing mercy to one another, and relieving the distressed. But, as the power of giving large alms can fall to the lot of few only, let them, that have but little, afford what they can spare, at least, with a kind and generous heart:

heart: ever remembering that the widow's mite, which benevolence stamped a value on, was acceptable to God; while the donations of the miser, debased with the marks of selfishness, were disregarded and unattended to. And as for those, whose urgent distress precludes the possibility of alleviating the wants of others, let them supply this deficiency by endeavours of a different kind. Let them practise those works of piety, which none can plead exemption from; such as visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted, making peace among their neighbours, &c.; all which are highly deserving, and well adapted to a season of penance.

Finally, dear brethren, as the mortification of our passions, and the amendment of our evil habits are the main design of this institution, all our efforts must centre here. For, what do you think it can benefit you to observe its outward ceremonies, while you neglect its very essence? Or, how can you hope to profit by adhering to the rules of temperance, if you wantonly give encouragement to the source of your disorders? If we indulge the display of vanity; if we remain enslaved to the power of anger; if we be wedded to the love of pleasure, what good have we to expect from fasting? No, Christians, no. In these and the like cases, a bare abstinence from meat can be of no service to our cause. It is true indeed we thus comply with the letter of the precept, by refraining from such things, as the Church forbids the use of: but this is nothing more than the shell, the external bark of our obligation. It is the end, the intention, I here speak of, that is the principal thing to be regarded in the performance of this duty. And, if this be neglected, we shall experience to our cost that we have not only foregone the advantages here designed us; but that we have increased the load of our guilt by the abuse of this holy institute.

Wherefore, friends, if you wish to make this fast such a *fast as God has chosen*, *Is. lviii. 5.* you see what you have to do, and in what manner you are to observe it. And here every motive tends to animate you. Interest and duty, fear and love, time and eternity, call equally for your compliance. It is, as you have seen, a fast, which, authorized by antiquity, bears a claim to the highest respect. In those early days, when the streams of religion flowed unsullied, the discipline of this season was regarded as indispensable. The spirit, of zeal, which then prevailed, not only led the faithful to observe it with punctuality, but to make additions to its rigours even. But alas! how are things altered! Is not this fast, which the pious believer of ancient days considered as inviolable, now trampled on by the generality? Is it not the ridicule of some; the aversion of others; the stumbling block of almost all? Does not the corruption of the age shrink from it, as unnecessary? And the depravity of our manners spurn at it, as intolerable? O Christian world! look at thy degeneracy, and blush. But how long shall men be blinded by the impositions of delusive error? How long shall humour or prepossession be the directors of their conscience?

Does

Does not reason tell them that the Deity, who has so often shook his scourge over the heads of the impenitent, is still the same? And that sin, the unhappy cause of his wrath, is still as heinous in his eyes as ever? Does not his unerring word inform them that, *unless they do penance, they shall all perish*. Luke xiii. 3. But no; nothing can rouse them from their insensibility and fatal stupor. The voice of reason is too feeble to be heard amidst the clamours of sensuality: the eternal truth of God himself too weak to stand the shock of dissoluteness and impiety. And shall we, dear people, suffer ourselves to be carried down by this impetuous torrent? Shall not the apprehension of those dreadful judgments, which a guilt, so general, cannot fail to provoke, rather move us to try to stem it?

Ye sinners! be advised, and look to your safety, while you may. The arm of vengeance is extended over you: *yet forty days and Nineve shall be destroyed*. Jonas iii. 4. Nor can any thing prevent your ruin, brethren, but a faithful observance of the regulations here proposed. And this I now most earnestly recommend to you, as far as circumstances may permit: that, as to-day you have heard the voice of heaven graciously calling you to repentance, so you may profit by the opportunity, and *be converted to your God*. Let then your correspondence with his mercy, and your obedience to his Church appease his indignation. In short, let such be your sincerity in renouncing sin, the principal object pointed at by the mortifications of this season, that it may introduce you to his grace in this life, and to his glory in the life to come. Amen.

DISCOURSE VII.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

On Penance, as a Virtue,

Unless you do penance, you shall all perish. Luke xiii. 5.

THE soul of the time of Lent, my friends, and what constitutes its very essence is, as reason itself dictates, a penitential and contrite spirit. For to what purpose the austerities, enjoined us, unless, by co-operating with the divine justice, we endeavour to appease its wrath? This point they cannot effect, however, except our inward sentiments keep pace with the outward discipline. All the rest, without this, is mere appearance and formality. Now, the penitential spirit hereby required implies the two things following: We must turn from sin to God, by a thorough change of disposition; and we must labour to avert his scourges by the sacrifice of mortification. In these two heads united consists the virtue of penance.

But, besides *the virtue* I mention, and which is generally termed repentance; there is *the sacrament* of penance also, which is no less obligatory and binding. For it is nothing else than this *virtue* reduced to a settled form. Of penance in this light (which we specify by the name of confession) I design to speak hereafter. At present I will endeavour to shew, first, the necessity of repentance in a general view; and secondly, to point out the happy consequences,

quences, that attend it. But as heaven must be our guide, we will previously implore its aid, and solicit its kind direction.

Repentance, I say, is a virtue, Christians, that consists of these two parts : first, a conversion of the interior and its affections from sin to God ; and secondly, an atonement to the divine justice for past offences and misdemeanours. And to be convinced of its necessity, we need but reflect on the nature of sin. For, although indeed we shall fail in our endeavours to find the bottom of it, yet a glimpse of this abyss will be sufficient to strike us with horror.

By sin then we offend a God, whose majesty is supreme, and whose perfections are infinite. By sin we fly in the face of his sovereign authority, and trample most daringly on his eternal and sacred laws. By sin we infringe the covenants, made with him at our baptism ; and violate the most solemn vows, attested by his Church. Finally, by sin we insult the source of generosity and goodness, and repay the greatest favours with the most base and vile ingratitude. Such is the enormity of sin, my brethren : and what more foul can we conceive ? If the height of an offence rises in proportion to the dignity of the party offended, can any thing be wanting to complete the malice of sin, which thus attacks, in person, the majestic Lord of heaven and earth ? Infinite, as he is, in all his attributes, so is the malignity of sin unbounded. O fatal evil ! whose polluted breath has cruelly blasted the whole creation, what tongue shall tell thy malice ! What an object of horror must thou be to the Deity, who is holiness itself ! And can we think, my friends, that so execrable an evil does not demand our detestation, before it can merit a pardon ? Or shall we persuade ourselves so atrocious a guilt can be passed over unregarded ? Rather, shall we not say that no aversion can be equal, no punishment adequate to such a composition of every thing odious ? Especially when we reflect that one of the qualities of our injured God is a severe and rigid justice ; and that this impels him to inflict on sin the chastisement it deserves.

No, dear people, be not thus misled by the delusive artifices of self-love, which may prompt you to hope that what I assert is a mere chimera of my own formation. Repentance or perdition is all that is left us after sin. What a rigid moralist, I hear you say ! How presumptuous to determine our fate, and prescribe laws to the sovereign mercy ! But, Christians, only call to mind the words of my text ; and, from the sacred name you bear, I will submit to your decision. *Unless you do penance, you shall perish.* Is this a doctrine of my own then, or the unerring word of the Deity ? But while you guard against yourselves, be no less fenced against the incredulous. Infidelity would fain persuade us that the idea of future punishments is extravagant and ungrounded. And, to prove it, her abettors are hourly draining the mines of sophistry. But what can make them thus industrious to oppugn a truth so well attested is more than I can say. For, supposing this notion erroneous, still the

the consequences of the belief of it are most friendly to society : and, allowing it to be authentic, what a restraint does it lay on vice ! The best construction then that can be put upon their busy opposition to it, is, that the thought of it is unwelcome and grating to their passions. And this they may succeed in suppressing for a time. But the approach of death will undeceive them : the cries of an alarmed conscience will then at least awake them to these no less terrifying than important truths ; viz. that God is just, that he will pursue the impenitent sinner with the utmost rigour, and exact even the last farthing of the heavy debt, that shall be owing to him.

Wherefore, if we are desirous to appease the Deity, and evade those eternal torments, that await sin beyond the grave, what must we do, my friends ? The answer is plain and obvious : we must *bring forth worthy fruits of penance*. Luke iii. 8. These, and these solely, can preserve us from future judgments. Penance must be our refuge therefore : under the protection of which we shall have nothing to apprehend. For our God, dear people, although infinitely just, is in no degree less merciful ; and the proper season of this his mercy is the time of our mortal life. This he daily displays around us ; and, by the most endearing exertion of it, affords us the opportunity of preventing the woes of hell by the practice of this saving virtue.

Not content with enforcing its necessity, he invites, he presses us to have recourse to it. *If the sinner, he says, shall do penance, the iniquities, which he hath committed, shall not be imputed to him. Be converted, he says again, and do penance for your crimes, and your wickedness shall not be your perdition : but on the contrary, if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as the purest snow.* Is, Here then is your remedy, Christians. Penance, the only chance of salvation, the sole plank of safety left you after the shipwreck of your innocence. Penance, the publication of which to a world, seated in iniquity, was the grand charge of the Prophets in the old law, of the Apostles in the new. Penance, by which the precursor of the great Redeemer, was to prepare the way before him. And finally, that penance, with the declaration of which the very Saviour of mankind was pleased to begin the solemn business of his mission.

But if still, my friends, you are dubious of the necessity of this virtue, look into the sacred writings. There you will find examples beyond doubt or dispute, that will convince you at once both of its obligation and efficacy.

Adam our first parent, soon after his creation, shakes off his allegiance and submission to his Maker. He is immediately banished from paradise with infamy and shame, and sentenced to contend with all the horrors of misery. Nor is this deluge of calamities poured solely upon him. His whole race are involved with him, (partaking of his guilt as members of one common head) and, like himself,

self, are consigned to both a temporal and eternal death. O atrocious and fatal sin ! Unhappy man ! hadst thou but used thy reason, couldest thou possibly have consented to a crime of so much consequence ? Yes, dear Christians ; he and all his posterity were destined to be the objects of an unrelenting justice. And what remedy in such a crisis ? None within the power or extent of human reach. Such must have been our doom for ages without end, had not the Son of the offended Deity become incarnate for our redemption. By making a personal atonement to the vengeance of his Father, he has enabled us to apply his merits for the abolition of our sins and the acquirement of his grace.

Afterwards, as the number of men is multiplied, so is their guilt increased proportionably. They neglect to have recourse to penance, and their punishment overtakes them. An universal deluge drowns and sweeps off the offending race ; exempting from the general wreck one single family only, that had retained its native innocence.

The succeeding generation, unawed by example, and forgetful of the judgments, that had been executed on their fathers, give, like them, a loose to corruption ; like them, neglect to do penance ; and, like them, arouse the fury of exasperated heaven. A hail of dreadful fire espouses the cause of virtue, and at once puts a period to their vices and existence.

David, renowned no less for his repentance than for his sin, is betrayed by the lure of passion into the enormous crime of adultery, which involves murder in its consequence. The Almighty deposes his prophet to apprise him of his guilt, and induce him by compunction to avert his indignant arm. He hears ; he obeys ; he receives a pardon.

To omit the many other instances, afforded us by the ancient testament, which are as numerous as striking, let us proceed to the new, my brethren, and see those it exhibits, that stand monuments of this virtue.

Besides the whole tenour of its doctrine, which so forcibly recommends to do penance, and the like, in a variety of passages ; in others, it displays a multiplicity of examples, that tend evidently to set forth the efficacy of repentance.

There we behold a prodigal son, who, having expended all his substance in criminal pursuits ; and, at length being reduced to the last stage of distress, returns to his loving parent, and recovers his lost favour. But not till he had begged forgiveness, and enjoined himself the rigorous penance of being treated in his own house as an abject and menial servant.

There we see a repenting Magdalen, who, hackneyed in the road of vice, quits its forlorn track, and goes in quest of her Redeemer. She finds him at a public table, surrounded with a crowd of strangers. But, deaf to the voice of pride, and attentive to her remorse only, she casts herself at his feet, in the presence of the astonished multitude. She lays open her wickedness to the view of the whole assembly,

assembly, and undauntedly implores the pardon and remission of her crimes. And as for the confusion annexed to, and attendant on the step she now takes, that she receives willingly, as a part of her just punishment. See here, Christians, the force of a firm conviction of the guilt of sin. Rather than suffer this noted penitent to breathe its contagious air, though only for a short space longer; it pushes her into such circumstances, as our reserve and delicacy cannot look upon without horror. To deserve and secure her safety, the rest of her days were dedicated to an unremitting course of piety. For, although she had received a full assurance of forgiveness, yet, after the death of Christ, she retired to a dreary wilderness; there to wipe off, by the practice of the most rude austerities, that debt of satisfaction, she had incurred by her former life.

It is needless, I make no doubt, dear people, to produce any further instances of the mighty efficacy of penance. The very rudiments of our divine religion, the slightest acquaintance with our Saviour's history, must be sufficient to inform you that he came among us for no other end, than *to seek the lost sheep; to heal the sick; and to call, not the just, but sinners to repentance.*

It only now remains therefore to take a passing view of the effects of this wholesome virtue. And happy shall we say the soul, whom the grace of God inspires, to have an humble recourse to it.

The first of these effects, my friends, and which follows naturally from what has been said, is the change of the eternal torments, to which sin makes us obnoxious into temporary sufferings. Penance, as you have seen, must indispensably be done either in this world, or in the next. Because the justice of God insists on satisfaction for the injury of sin. And his indulgent mercy is pleased, not only to accept the penance you inflict upon yourselves, as a reparation to his honour; but even to press you to it in the strongest terms possible. And can it be a doubt with you which of the two to embrace? Sufferings of your own choice, light, transitory, and short? Or sufferings inflicted by heaven, and continued throughout eternity?

The second effect of this virtue is to reinstate us in the grace of God. What a subject of heart-felt joy must it be to the conscious soul, to be restored to her Maker's favour, reconciled to her only good, and re-established in her claim to happiness, which she had forfeited by sin!

The third effect of repentance is to put us on our guard, and make us cautious for the future. For in sin there are many degrees, which gradually sink the unwary into the abyss of all corruption. The truly penitent soul therefore will be careful how he proceeds. At the appearance of vice she will stop, and fly from the impending danger. Her experience will be her guide; and this will tell her plainly that, although the temptation be weak, her welfare forbids the risk of it.

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For the links of the chain of wickedness are hardly to be perceived, and vice steals upon us by almost insensible reproaches. You begin, Christians, for instance, by neglecting your usual prayers. This first step paves the way to more culpable omissions. By-and-by a kind of aversion upon this duty creeps upon you; which at length makes you loathe the very thoughts of attending to it. Thus a habit of sloth is quickly formed; in consequence of which, the source of divine grace being cut off and rescinded, the soul, from a cause apparently inconsiderable, becomes a prey to every temptation, and a sink of all iniquity. And the like is the case in every other species of sin. For vice, which unmasked, would be too shocking to the most flagitious even, always makes its advances by degrees and under cover. Whereas, did you but return to your duty before the voice of grace was stifled, all these consequences would be obviated, and your innocence preserved.

In fine, the last effect of repentance is that lovely peace of conscience, that enviable tranquillity it never fails to bring with it. Sin, is at all times accompanied with its punishment. Anxiety and remorse, are its inseparable attendants. Conscience, that sage admonitor, implanted in every breast, incessantly reproaches and torments the wilful sinner. Immersed in the gloom of guilt, the terrors of eternity ever haunt his frightened thoughts. But repentance, bursting on him, like the Sun on the labouring day, at once enlightens, cheers, and restores him to himself.

Such are the happy effects, dear people, of a true and sincere repentance, the obligation of which, to most of us, is so essential and indispensable. For in short, the only road to salvation, is either that of innocence, which few can say they walk in; or this of repentance, through the merits of Christ, which are here laid open to us.

Consider what it cost your Saviour to purchase this blessing for you. Behold him, the Son of God, hanging on a cross, covered with wounds, and yielding up his spirit to unfold the gates of mercy to you. Hear him, in this agony of distress, crying out, *I thirst*, I die with drought for the salvation of sinners. And, if every spark of divine love be not extinguished in your breast, run to him without delay, and bathe his sacred feet with the bitter tears of grief and sorrow.

But should any of you, my friends, (although heaven forbid the idea) be insensible to his boundless charity, let the sense of their own danger, at least, awaken them to their duty. Let them view the terrors of hell that await the impenitent sinner. Let them listen to the cries of woe with which their gloomy caverns resound, and attend to the remonstrances of its devoted inhabitants. O ye thoughtless and hardened offenders! whom the benignity of your God is insufficient to reclaim, come and see the offences of his inexorable justice. See in us the dreadful consequences of wickedness and obduracy. Like you, we once gave a loose to the depravity of corrupt

rupt nature ; and, like us, unless you repent, you will, ere long, be ingulfed in torments. As it is with us to-day, so will it be with you to-morrow.

O my dear brethren ! may their unhappy fate be a warning to us all. And thou, O God of mercy ! who hast assured us, thou wilt *not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live*, compassionate our misery. Enable us, we entreat thee, to take advantage of thy indulgence, and, by a sincere conversion from the ways of sin and death, to deprecate thy judgments. May thy light discover to us the errors of our past conduct ; and thy grace empower us effectually to redress them : that in this life, we may exist the models of a true repentance, and in the next, be made happy by the possession of eternal glory. Amen.

On Repentance as a Sacrament.

PREPAREDNESS, and being in a state of grace, is the first and most essential condition of the efficacy of the sacrament of repentance. It is a state of the soul, in which the sinner is fully conscious of his guilt, and is determined to forsake his iniquities, and to turn to God with a sincere heart. This state of mind is necessary, because the sacrament of repentance is a means of grace, and it is only by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the heart of the true believer, that the sinner can be enabled to perform the duties which are required of him. The sacrament of repentance is a sacrament of the church, and it is only by the participation of the church, that the sinner can be enabled to receive the full benefit of the sacrament. The church is the body of Christ, and it is only by the participation of the church, that the sinner can be enabled to receive the full benefit of the sacrament. The church is the body of Christ, and it is only by the participation of the church, that the sinner can be enabled to receive the full benefit of the sacrament.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

On Penance as a Sacrament.

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the just. 1. John ii. 1.

PENANCE, dear people, as a virtue was the subject on which I expatiated and held forth to you in my last. In that discourse I told you that it consists of two essential parts; viz. a sincere conversion to God, and a voluntary satisfaction to his insulted and provoked justice. Considered in this light, I made it apparent to you, that penance, or if you prefer the name of repentance, is of universal obligation; exempting no one from its practice, whose misfortune may have involved him in a state of guilt and sin.

To-day I must again call your attention to this matter. You may remember, I before informed you, that besides the *virtue* treated of, there is the *sacrament* of penance likewise: by which nothing more is meant than the application of this same virtue in a regular and settled form. In this point of view I design to exhibit it at present; or, in other words, to speak of it as a sacrament of the law of grace. As Catholics, we subscribe to the authenticity of its establishment. We believe it to be an institute, ordained by Jesus Christ, for the remission of our sins. And, on these grounds, we submit to it, as practised by his Church. Momentous as it is therefore, it highly behoves us to be acquainted with its features. To introduce you to which, my friends, I will lay them fully open
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in the three subsequent discourses. In this of to-day (which is the first of them) I will set before you the nature and constituent parts of this great sacrament; in the second, I will shew the necessity and obligation of applying to it; and in the third, I will explain the method of doing it to advantage. But let us begin the undertaking by an address to the spirit of light.

As the reasonableness of the evangelical precepts, and the tendency of their doctrine, are clear and undoubted proofs of the Christian religion; so is the institution of the sacrament of penance, a particular and effectual argument of the commiseration of its heavenly Founder.

Unhappy man! stripped of his original justice, and divested of those decorations of grace, with which he rose adorned from his Creator's hand, how deplorable is his condition! Immediately, my friends, his soul becomes a scene of wild confusion. Ignorance and error misguide his judgment. Depravity and malice pervert his heart. Irregularity and tumult pervade his whole frame. No longer obedient to the rule of wisdom, no longer submissive to the voice of reason, his rebellious passions assume the sceptre, and plunge him headlong into the depth of wretchedness.

In vain did Philosophy exert its powers to give a check to things, and bring them round again to their proper channel. Its light indeed discovered that virtue and vice are incompatible; and that the former alone can lead to happiness, either in this world, or in the next. But its efforts were incompetent to correct and amend depravity; its reach inadequate to offer a pardon, and ensure security for the time to come. In vain even was the voice of God put forth, and his sacred will revealed to the Jews, his select and chosen people. Every period of their history attests the influence of habitual wickedness and the tyranny of rooted passion. They had a variety of sacrifices to answer the different ends of man's duty to his Maker. And, in particular with regard to sin, they had the victims of propitiation, ordained by the law of heaven, as the means of making atonement for it. But, dear Christians, the whole efficacy of these sacrifices, was derived from the abundant merits of the future passion of the Messiah. For, says St. Paul, *it is impossible that with the blood of goats sin should be taken away.* Heb. x. 4. How much more insufficient then were these gross and carnal offerings to solace the oppressed heart, to ease the burthened mind, and to support the tottering steps of infirm and feeble virtue?

Ah! my brethren. This was a work reserved for the coming of the Son of God. It was his blessed presence solely that could renovate in man the defaced image of his Creator. His almighty hand could alone apply the balsam such ulcered wounds demanded. Nothing else but this could administer an effective remedy. He was *the Prophet of the Most High*, long before announced and proposed to a desponding world; the grand intent of whose appearance was strongly marked in the name given him by the command of heaven itself. *Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people*
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from their sins. Matt. i. 21. Yes, dear people, a Jesus, who came not only to dispense pardon to a guilty and condemned race; but to bring comfort to the wretched, and direct their wandering steps into the track of immortal bliss.

The design, you say, is noble, and worthy of a God. And yet, great as it is, Christians, he has fully accomplished it by the institution of confession. This, as I said before, we admit to be a sacrament, established by himself, as the remedy for sin; a sacrament which he has bequeathed as a legacy to his Church, by virtue of that power, he was invested with *over all things*; a sacrament, on which he has fixed the broad seal of his omnipotence. To which I add, my friends, a sacrament, that, besides the forgiveness of our offences, affords us medicines in our diseases, counsel in our doubts, and comfort in our afflictions. Finally, a sacrament, which enables us to withstand the force of passion, to suppress corrupt nature, and to vindicate with courage, the cause of righteousness and virtue. How much then are we indebted to his immense, his unbounded goodness, who has thus graciously vouchsafed to commiserate and heal our wretchedness; *to redeem our lives from destruction, and to crown us with his mercy; to deliver us from the band of oppression, and uphold us in the path of godliness?* For such truly, dear people, are the favours our Jesus offers us in this sacrament of penance: favours, which to use the expression of the royal Psalmist, *we have received in the midst of his temple*, by the institution of his heavenly ordinance, established in his Church; through the means of which he exhibits himself our constant Mediator.

Now, as to the parts that compose this sacrament, according to the usual and stated method, I divide them into three; viz. contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Contrition, is a sorrow for sin, because, by it we offend our God, including a determination never more to commit it wilfully. Confession, is the discovery of our guilt to the pastors of the Church, authorized by the word of Christ, to take cognizance of, and remit it. Satisfaction, in a general sense, is a voluntary reparation to the injured honour of the Deity; and, as relating to this sacrament, it is a faithful discharge of the penance enjoined and accepted in the confessional. Moreover, it is but proper to acquaint you with the view with which these inflictions are imposed. And this, brethren, is no other than that, by the works of piety here subscribed, you may diminish the heavy debt you stand accountable to the divine justice for. Satisfaction, I have before shewn you, is so closely interwoven with the malignity of sin, as to be inseparable from its existence. So that, whoever has wilfully infringed the commandments of God, is indispensably bound to expiate, and make amends for his fault. To this matter therefore, on which I have been so explicit already, I shall add nothing more at present; only informing you, once for all, that the penances we are now speaking of, are given with this intent; and consequently, that in performing them, we should be
actuated

actuated with the same spirit. But, as whatever inflictions may be suffered, they must still fall very short of effecting the wished-for purpose, the pious Christian will do his best to supply their deficiencies, by a constant attention to the practice of good works.

With regard to confession, I design to make it the subject of a future discussion. Wherefore, I will confine what I mean to say now to the article of contrition, which is generally understood to be the first part of this august sacrament.

Contrition, then, is a sorrow for sin, founded not only on the sense of the danger this evil lays us open to, but much more on the love of God, insulted and injured by it. Nor can it be deemed sincere, my friends, unless, besides a grief for the past, it includes a resolution not to trespass for the future.

The excellence of contrition is visible on the very outlines of its character. For it is of a quality so superior, as to vie with the greatest sacrifice man can offer to the Deity; even with that infinitely meritorious one, which his beloved Son was pleased to make upon the altar of the cross.

So efficacious is its power, that, in the language of St. Ambrose, it closes the jaws of hell, although gaping to devour us; and unfolds the gate of heaven, when barred against us by our enemies.

So acceptable is it to God, that a contrite and humble heart, he has declared he *will not despise*. Ps. 50.

So advantageous to wretched man, that it not only brings him the forgiveness of his offences; but, when united with the sacrament, opens the treasury of divine grace to him.

In short, so absolutely essential is it to the remission of our sins, that, to look for a pardon without it, is the summit of delusion. A deficiency in this line, would not only render abortive the kind intentions of our God, but go to sink us deeper, by the additional load of sacrilege.

Happy contrition, the balm of comfort, the grand restorative of lost innocence! But how shall we distinguish, say you, this true and sincere compunction, which alone can be available, from that counterfeit and false grief, which is too often mistaken for it.

If you are sorry for your faults, because they displease and offend your Maker. If you are determined for the time to come, to renounce and avoid all sin; and cordially disposed to make every sacrifice, rather than to return to it any more. If you are resolved to shun the occasions, which either have been already, or are likely for the future to prove the inducements to your transgressing; such as bad company, which is apt to flatter and encourage your evil habits; irreligious or immodest books, that debauch and corrupt your minds. If you are prepared to break the bonds of your criminal attachments, and uniformly adhere to the service of the Deity. Such a contrition as this, is unquestionably genuine, and cannot fail to secure to you the blessings of a true conversion.

As to the motives to be recurred to to obtain this change of heart, they are principally two; viz. the enormity of sin, and the goodness of God.

And with respect to the former of them, what I told you in my last may be enough to convince you, Christians, of the malice of this evil. To which we may add the sense and consideration of its fatal consequences. It is the parent, we know, of hell, and of hell's infernal spirits: and as it was originally the curse and bane of the rebel angels, so will it for ever be equally hostile to the welfare of mankind. And to recapitulate in brief what I then said upon the latter motive; sin is an injury done to him, who is the source of all goodness; to him who created you by his power, and who supports you by his protection; to him who preserves you from all dangers, and loads you with benefactions; to him, in fine, who made you, that you might be happy in his enjoyment, and possess him eternally in the mansions of his bliss. Weigh these reasons well, my brethren; and you will want no further inducement to renounce and abhor iniquity.

But should these motives fail to excite you to a true repentance, call to mind the sufferings of your Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Nothing can shew more clearly the evidence of these two points; the enormity of sin, I mean, and the detestation, we ought to hold it in.

The life of this God incarnate, was one continued scene of sufferings; and of sufferings embraced freely for the expiation of this evil. But what a prospect of distress and misery does the well-known tragedy of his passion offer? Paint him in your imagination, Christians, after having already endured the most inhuman and barbarous torments, hanging on a cross, an instrument of torture the most ignominious, as well as cruel; every bone of his body dislocated, every sinew of it stretched, every part of it bruised or mangled. Nature stands appalled at the sight of his various sufferings. *From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there is no soundness in him.* And, as if these dire afflictions were not altogether adequate to the enormous guilt of sin: as if it did not suffice for the atonement of this insult, that the only Son of the Almighty Father should become the derision of the people, and the outcast of mankind; behold him, my friends, deserted by his own eternal Parent even; abandoned, without resource, to the relentless fury of his enemies, and yielding up his breath in this unparalleled distress.

Oh, dear people! If you reflect on this horrid scene, every further consideration must surely become unnecessary. For what can prove more fully the infinite heinousness of sin, than the sight here presented to you? Take a serious view of it, and tell me your opinion. What must you think of this monster, when you see your Jesus bleeding for it? When you see him, on account of it, combating with the horrors of an untimely and public death? When
you

you see, in fine, a God, who is clemency itself, punishing it so rigorously in the person of his beloved Son ? But that, which must affect principally every feeling and generous breast, is the unutterable love and charity, our Redeemer here displays. For, on the testimony of his sacred word, these his sufferings were wholly voluntary. *He was offered, because it was his will.* Is. liii. 7. Yes, my brethren, his boundless love for us was the motive, that induced him to submit to such unheard of torments. It was this rendered sweet to him the agonies of a death, that expressions are too feeble and too imperfect to describe.

Ponder this matter thoroughly therefore ; and let the sense of his infinite charity ever regulate your conduct to him. And, when you apply to his mercy in the sacrament of penance, let the recollection of his dreadful sufferings inspire you with proper sentiments. Let the view of his bitter chalice allay the repugnance, you may possibly feel, in the execution of this branch of your duty ; and the remembrance of his bloody sacrifice force the tears of a sincere compunction from the rock of your callous heart. Thus will his holy institute be advantageous and beneficial to you ; and he, who appeared on earth that he might *take away the sins of the world*, will be your advocate in heaven, and crown you with his blessings. Amen.

DISCOURSE IX.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the Obligation of Confession.

When a man or woman shall have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, they shall confess their sin. Numbers v. 6, 7.

SUCH, dear Christians, in the old law, was the cure prescribed for sin to the people, whom God had selected from among the nations for his own. A cure, which, although of itself inefficacious, and in no degree available but through the future passion of Jesus Christ, nevertheless was a palpable type of the sacrament of penance, to be afterwards established. It was reserved for the new covenant, (that covenant of grace and mercy, sealed by the death of a God incarnate, under which we have the happiness to live) to be the depositary of this august legacy, bequeathed by him as the remedy for sin, from which he here cleanses us in the laver of his own inestimable blood.

Of this divine sacrament contrition, or a sincere sorrow for our offences, is the first part; and a part so essential, that nothing can supply the defect of it. The second is confession, or the declaration of our sins to the Pastors of the Church. Of this I mean to speak at present: designing, first, to lay before you, friends, the necessity of this duty; and, secondly, to denote the times, in which it principally

cipally calls upon you; after soliciting the grace of heaven for our guidance and direction.

Auricular or sacramental confession is the manifestation of our sins to the ministers of God, authorized by his commission to absolve us from the guilt of them.

That such a manifestation, or confession of our offences is necessary to their remission, is evident from the words of Christ, as related by St. John. Hear what he says, my brethren, when he confers the power of forgiving sins on his disciples and his Church. *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.* John xx. 22, 23. Listen to his words, I repeat, and argue from their obvious meaning. We here see clearly expressed a twofold and double power; viz. a power of loosing from sin, and a power of binding under it. But, in a matter of such importance, a matter attended with eternal consequences, which ever way the scale inclines, this authority of taking from, or adding to the balance, cannot be supposed a blind authority, an authority to be exercised without knowledge, without information, without intelligence. Wherefore, at the same time as Christ imparted to his Apostles this jurisdiction over sin, either to remit or forgive it, as circumstances might require, he likewise gave them the power requisite to discern between sin and sin; between the persons, whose more venial faults should be deserving of a pardon, and those, whose grosser crimes might not merit such a favour. But by what means could they, or their successors in the sacred ministry, be enabled to make this discernment of the people's sins, unless these sins were revealed and opened to their view? How should they distinguish whose offences were to be forgiven, whose not, unless they were made acquainted with them? And how should they become acquainted with them, unless the faithful were necessitated to disclose them by confession?

Secondly, dear people, by those words, *whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven*, &c. our divine Saviour appointed his disciples Judges in that spiritual kingdom, he came to establish in his Church over the souls of Christians, who constitute his empire. By these he vests them with a judicial power of pronouncing sentence, whether of absolution or condemnation, according to the merits of the cause. But, can they exercise this power, if the cause be unknown to them? At the bar of human judicature, does the Judge deliver his sentence uninformed and in the dark? Must he not hear the accusation first? Must he not interrogate the witnesses, and, by repeated examinations, take a satisfactory account of the transaction submitted to him? Is this authority to be contested? Or rather does not reflection inform us that his office requires and his character implies it? Does not reason assure us that the primitive power, which invests him with the name and privileges of a Judge, of consequence invests him with the authority of scrutinizing and inquiring minutely into such matters, as come before him? Otherwise, I ask, how

how is it possible his sentence should be conformable to the laws of equity? Wherefore, as the Priests of the Church are on a similar line in the confessional with the Judges of a kingdom on the bench of legal judicatures, the like helps must they have, to execute their office consistently with justice.

Lastly, the above words, *whose sins, you shall forgive, &c.*; according to the explication of the Doctors of antiquity, are an extension to all the Apostles of the power granted to St. Peter. *Thou art Peter*, Christ says to him; *and upon this rock I will build my Church: and to thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* Matt. xvi. 18. The name of Peter signifies *a rock*; on the solid basis of which the Son of God has erected his Church; a basis so strong and firm, that the powers of darkness shall try in vain to make any impression on its stability; *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Ibid. Here our Lord declares the high trust, to which he raises this Apostle; viz. to be the foundation-stone of his Church, and, next to himself, the chief prop and support of his heavenly structure. But what is to be understood, my friends, by the mysterious keys here given to him? That it might not be obscured by a doubtful uncertainty, nor wrested to a wrong sense by any sinister interpretation, Christ explains it himself, by immediately subjoining; *and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.* The keys therefore of the kingdom of heaven mean the remission and retention of sins, first conferred on Peter, and afterwards imparted to a full assembly of the Disciples. And the signification of them tells us that, as we cannot gain admittance, when a place is locked up, but by applying to the persons, that are intrusted with the keys of it; so there is no entrance into heaven, when its doors are shut against us, but by having recourse to the pastors of the Church, to be absolved from our crimes, which stand, like a gate of adamant, between the sinner and his God. Nor have we any other means of making this application than by revealing our sins. For as it is impossible they should be remitted, unless they be known; so it is impossible they should be known, unless manifested by confession.

Wherefore, if any one would dispute the necessity of confession, he must either deny the authority granted to the Church in the most unequivocal terms, or totally disavow the evidence of reason. For, allowing the words cited, one of these two things must follow of consequence, viz. either that the faithful are obliged to confess their faults, or that the power imparted by Christ of forgiving or retaining sins is nugatory and vain.

And this, Christians, is a difficulty, which the opponents of the catholic faith have at all times felt the weight of. Wherefore, rather than act against the testimony of reason, the wisest of them have candidly been favourable to this practice. Luther even himself, that main pillar of the protestant edifice, so far from condemning, or discountenancing it as superfluous, commends it as a laudable

able and useful institution. In unison with whom, the liturgy or common prayer book of the Church of England instructs its ministers, in the article of the visitation of the sick, after having received the declaration and confession of the infirm, to absolve them in the very form, made use of by the catholic institute.

The necessity of confession being so strongly established then, shall we, my dear people, presume to make light of it? Shall we, I say, who have been trained up in the doctrine of the catholic Church, pretend to contest a point with her, which even those, that dissent from her faith, allow of and inculcate? Far be it from me, to think any of you so inclined. No, I cannot doubt but you are fully sensible of the importance of this duty, and entirely disposed to correspond with its obligations. For which reason, instead of offering any further arguments to evince its necessity, which both the authenticity of the sacred text and the practice of antiquity are competent to supply; I will proceed to shew the times, when your compliance with this regulation is more particularly incumbent.

You are sufficiently informed to know, my brethren, that it is an express command of the Church, that all her subjects, who have attained the years of discretion, shall confess their offences, at least once in the year. Neither need I tell you that, wilfully to transgress this or any of her precepts, is a sin of disobedience to an authority established over you by the highest of all powers. The particular time assigned for the performance of this annual duty is not explicitly determined. Implicitly however and virtually we may safely say it is; since, by another special ordinance, we are enjoined to approach at Easter to the banquet of the Eucharist. Of course this same term is universally esteemed assigned for the discharge of the duty in question; as no one surely would be so hardy as to appear at that awful table, without having *tried himself*, as St. Paul terms it, and cleared his conscience of all sin.

In this regard I wish you to observe, my friends, that the confession, required to satisfy this precept, must necessarily be a good and valid one. If it be defective, either from a culpable inattention in the examination of your conscience, from a wilful concealment of any mortal sin, or from the want of a sincere sorrow for the past or a resolution of future amendment; such a confession, Christians, does not answer the design. The sacrilegious Catholic, so far from having fulfilled the obligation laid upon him, continues still under its tie, and bound, as soon as possible, to make good his deficiency. And as to the refractory, who contemptuously absent themselves, let them be assured their crime will rise upon them, in proportion to their obstinacy and to the scandal which they give to their brethren in faith.

But, besides this yearly confession, exacted by the Church, there are many other occasions, in which this practice is obligatory. The intent of the coming of the Son of God into the world was *that he might cleanse us to himself an acceptable people, a pursuer of good works,*
who

who should live soberly, justly and godly. Tit. ii. 14. With this design he instituted the laver of penance, where, at all times, his followers might be washed from the stains of sin. Consequently, he requires of them that, whenever they may have fallen from the state of godliness he exacts, and which is the effect of every mortal sin, they make immediate application to the treasury of his grace, to be once more restored, by the sacramental absolution, to the privileges of innocence. So that, by the institution of Christ, confession becomes necessary on the commission of any deadly sin: to continue in which state wilfully, besides that it renders us guilty of being at enmity with God, is to make void our redemption, and defeat, as much as depends on us, the beneficial purposes of our Saviour.

To consider the blindness of our understanding, the depravity of our heart, and the violence of our passions; not to mention the influence of overhearing custom, the example of a deluded world, and the artifice of the devil, indefatigable in mischief, will be more than sufficient, Christians, to make you thoroughly sensible that, to live free from the contagion of sin for any length of time, is a thing nothing can effect but a special grace of heaven, which no one is entitled to. Wherefore, although, by the regulation established, this duty of confession obliges you once a year only; yet, by the frailty of human nature and the urgent cries of conscience, it will be found to be extended to a multiplicity of occasions. As for instance, whenever you are called upon to receive any other sacrament, to partake of all which you should be in a state of grace: whenever there may appear a probability of death; whether owing to sickness, or any accidental event, that may possibly be fatal: but above all, whenever you find your conscience oppressed with the weight of sin, you are indubitably bound to have recourse to this remedy, according to the intention of its heavenly Author.

With ourselves, dear people, the seasons, on which it should be used, are in a manner marked out by the terms of the indulgences. On these occasions, although it be not necessary, yet it is highly advisable, and what I earnestly recommend, for all to frequent it: that, as the said grants are fixed at suitable distances, and annexed to the chief times of devotion, the course of the year presents us with, we may both be enabled to keep our accounts in order, and offer on such occurrences, hearts purified from sin; a sacrifice that of all others, will be the most acceptable to the Deity.

Such, brethren, is the extent and obligation of confession: an obligation interwoven with the authority bequeathed by Christ; and which, as it is the means of his appointment to obtain the pardon of our sins, is the sole condition, on which a forgiveness is to be hoped for.

If, at the same time, we cast our eyes on the dangers that surround us, embarked as we are on the tempestuous ocean of life; where, besides the inconstancy of our state and the frailty of our nature,

nature, an implacable enemy exerts his efforts, and that but too successfully to accomplish our destruction; we shall want no further proof to be convinced, that of all the mercies of our God, of all the advantages resulting from the incarnation of his Son, there is hardly one that surpasses this sacred institution.

And shall any exhortation, my friends, be needful to recommend it to you? Can persuasion be wanting to make you diligent in a duty, the discharge of which is so necessary and so beneficial at the same time? Set before your eyes the sad condition of the damned. See them encompassed with horrors and frantic despair: behold that execrable origin of their misery, sin, rankling in their bosoms, harrowing up their souls, and preying on their inmost vitals, without pause or intermission. Behold this, I say, and tell me whether, if they were allowed to disburthen themselves by confession, you think they would hesitate to accept the offer made them? Rather may we not suppose such a permission would appear to them the greatest mercy of indulgent heaven? But, alas! their time is no more. They have imprudently let slip the day of their visitation, the hour of clemency and pardon; and now they are doomed irrevocably to be victims of an eternal vengeance. That the like may never be our own case, let us take advantage of their misfortunes, and profit by their errors: that as sin, unconfessed and uncanceled sin alone, is the cause of all their misery; so a frequent and devout recourse to confession, the sovereign antidote to this mortal poison, may preserve us both from its pestilential infection in this life, and from its baleful consequences in the life to come. Amen.

DISCOURSE

D I S C O U R S E X.
F I F T H S U N D A Y O F L E N T.

On the Method of Confession.

I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord.

Pf. xxxi. 6,

THE confession of our sins, brethren, as I have already remarked, is a necessary condition to obtain the forgiveness of them. This sovereign and effectual remedy is the institution of an infinite wisdom. Let no one then condemn it or be frightened at its difficulties. It is an humbling thought, I grant, to become our own accusers, and reveal our most secret crimes to one, who, though a Pastor, is still a mortal, frail like ourselves. But, if we consider our presumption in daring to exalt ourselves above the Deity, to despise his authority, and violate his eternal law, we surely cannot think this humiliation unmerited.

But, my friends, if you reflect yet further on the confusion that must attend the full exposure of uncanceled sin, at the tribunal of the last day, you will certainly acknowledge the terms of this sacrament to be favourable and indulgent. Where is the criminal, who, being promised a pardon on the condition of disclosing his guilt to a person obligated to secrecy, would not joyfully embrace the offer? Down then with pride. Down with imaginary fears; which, groundless as they are, have but too great a prevalence in deterring some from this practice, and prompting others to resort to a sacrilegious duplicity.

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As for you, my dear people, who, I hope are better tutored than to be so grossly imposed upon, study rather to perform it so as to answer its design. To instruct you to do this, is what I purpose at present, by instructing you at large the whole method of confession. The disquisition must be long: but, as this duty is so important, both in itself and its consequences, I presume an explication of it will not be deemed superfluous. Let us first, however, implore the direction of God's spirit.

The end of confession, I must previously inform you, Christians, is to obtain the forgiveness and pardon of our sins. With this view you present yourselves to the minister of heaven, and make a declaration of the state of your conscience. I need not apprize you that the priest herein acts solely as God's instrument, without whose awful sanction, his absolution is of no avail. The pardon therefore you sue for, must come wholly from the Lord; who, although he appoints his agents to pronounce the judicial sentence, reserves the ratification of it to his own almighty power. Wherefore, to obtain the desired forgiveness, you must address yourselves to him, who is the fountainhead of grace.

The first part then of your preparation to confession, is to turn to your God, and entreat him with fervour to succour and assist you. A perfect change of heart, and an undisguised sincerity in the accusation of your sins, are duties to which you are here indispensably engaged, and which none but himself can enable you to fulfil.

Having solicited his help, you are next to turn your thoughts to the examination of your conscience. But as this is a matter, in which, from the delusions of self-love, we are liable to many errors, you must proceed in it with caution. To perform it with impartiality, you would do well to imagine you are about to appear at the tribunal of the Deity, to render to him in person an account of your conduct. Neither is this supposition more advantageous than necessary. For, although you be not cited to that solemn bench of justice at which he presides, a visible and severe Judge; you voluntarily present yourselves at the seat of his mercy, where he hears your cause invisibly, and offers pardon through his ministers. With this impression therefore, you may begin the said inquiry.

Now, you must know, brethren, there are various kinds of sin. There are some that are committed willingly, and with full deliberation, in a matter of moment; and these are called mortal sins. There are others that are less atrocious from the want of knowledge or consent; or which, from their object, are less important and offensive; and these we style venial. There are sins of commission also, and sins of omission. Of the former we become guilty by transgressing against those articles that imply a prohibition; as *thou shalt not kill*: and of the latter, by neglecting to comply with any duty which the sacred law enjoins; as *remember thou keep holy the sabbath day*. Lastly, there are sins of deed, of word, and of thought.

thought. As for the two first, they are sufficiently understood : and, in regard to the sins of thought, be pleased to observe, that whatever is unlawful to do, it is likewise criminal to indulge the thought of. For instance, if it be a sin to steal, it is also a sin to harbour the thought of purloining another's property : if it be a sin to commit adultery, it is a sin to entertain the thought of it, knowingly and willingly. I say *knowingly and willingly*. For unless we make such thoughts our own, by the act of our free will, they will not at least be mortal ; but only so far chargeable as we shall have indulged them with reflection, or have been more or less remiss in rejecting and repelling them. Evil thoughts are often permitted for the trial of our virtue. Wherefore, in this respect, you are to inquire not so much how many bad thoughts you may have had, as how many you may have given admission to, with knowledge and deliberation. And as many of them as you discover, so many must you confess, no less than your transgressions by action or by word.

Begin this examination therefore by a general survey of your conscience. See what has been your course of life since the time of your last confession ; what company you have kept ; what temptations you have been exposed to ; in what manner you have fulfilled the duties of your respective callings ; and thence proceed gradually to a more particular investigation.

In which regard, to help yourselves, you may consult what we call the decalogue, or table of ten commandments. And, to do it the more distinctly, take each precept as it comes in order. Inquire, therefore, in the first place, whether you have sinned against the first of them, by any of the ways of breaking it, explained in your spiritual books. Hence, go to the second commandment, and so on throughout the whole of them. Which method I advise you to follow, as far as possible, in the confessional.

The precepts of God and his Church, being thus diligently investigated, you are next to examine closely into the seven capital and deadly vices. These, which are so many branches of the pestiferous trunk of self-love, give birth to all our disorders. They demand the strictest scrutiny therefore ; and this the more justly, as we are too often deceived in them. Carnal sins indeed are readily discerned from the shame they reflect upon us. But as for spiritual crimes, of which nature the capital vices are mostly composed, they easily elude our search, as we ourselves alone are privy to them. Nay, so far are we imposed upon, that frequently the persons who are the most infected with their malice, think themselves innocent, and clear of all such guilt.

Thus far for those who can read. As to them that have not this advantage, my advice to them is, after having taken the best view of their conscience they can, upon the general points I have hinted at, to desire their confessor to question them, and to answer his inquiries with sincerity and candour.

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What length of time this examination may demand, is not to be ascertained. Every one must judge for himself, according to the work upon his hands. It cannot require so much to discover the sins of a month or two, as those of our whole life. Neither will the serious and devout Christian, who walks with a steady pace in the presence of his God, want half the time necessary for the dissipated worldling. However, this we may safely say, that all must give so much to it as may suffice for the due performance of a work of such importance.

But I cannot dismiss this subject without adding another remark, which perhaps may not be needless. It is apparent from what has been said, dear people, that, besides the general quality or nature of your offences, you are bound to examine their number, i. e. to inquire how often you may have fallen into each sort of sin. For it makes a wide difference in our guilt to have committed a crime once or twice only, or to have perpetrated the said crime twenty or thirty times. But, if a person cannot fix or recollect the number, let him, on due reflection, make the best conjecture he is able. Yet, if it should so happen, that having lived for any space in a state of habitual sin, every guess may be impracticable; in this case, I say, he need not think of attempting it; but rather let him examine the length of time that he has lived in the commission of such a fault; and how often, during that space, he may be guilty of it in a month, in a week, or in a day. This will be the easiest, if not the only way of forming any thing like a just opinion.

But there are still two other points to be attended to in this examen; the first of which is the motive or occasion of our sins. For example, if we find that we have aspersed our neighbour's character, we must, in the next place, see what it was that incited us to injure him; whether it was hatred, swelling with gall; or pride, prompting us to raise and exalt ourselves on his ruin; or envy, as it often is, suggesting that his good qualities eclipsed our own of whatever kind. The like inquiry we should make into the source of all our other sins; without which we do but skim the wound, instead of probing it as we ought. The second article to be considered is, that concurrence of circumstances, with which sin is sometimes vested, that either alter entirely the nature of a crime, or aggravate its guilt in a considerable degree. For instance, in the case of swearing, to annex the name of God to a truth, which is certain, or to what we know to be a lie, is a different kind of sin; the first being simply swearing, the second, perjury. To eat meat on days prohibited is a sin, as you are conscious: but to eat it through a contempt of that authority, which forbids you, is a far blacker crime. Similar distinctions occur in other precepts, which, unless you pay attention to, you will do your work by halves only.

62 In short, my friends, in examining your conscience, four things are to be looked into; the quality of your sins; their number; the

the motive they take their rise from; and the circumstances, if there be any, that either change their nature, or augment their malignity. These four points investigated, you may rest satisfied on this head.

But you are not to stop here, nor suppose, that having finished this inquiry into your sins, you are fitted for the confessional. Another part, and that by far the most essential, is still to be begun: I mean the acquisition of a true sorrow, without which it is in vain to look for a pardon.

This part of your preparation, Christians, can only be the work of the right hand of the Most High. You may indeed; nay, you are bound, by the means of prayer and meditation, to endeavour to complete it. But the change of the heart must come wholly from God. Him you must apply to therefore by repeated solicitations; not ceasing to knock at the door of his mercy, until he shall be pleased to open it to your importunities, and infuse in your souls a true spirit of compunction. But having obtained this gift of him, and settled a plan for your future deportment, you may safely advance to the tribunal of confession.

And, in this regard, my brethren, to give you some previous rules, I know no better than those prescribed by St. Francis of Sales. First, not to make use of negatives or general accusations; by saying, for instance, *I have not prayed with so much devotion as I ought*; which, in fact, is saying nothing. Instead of which, you should mention the particular fault you have been guilty of; whether it be in having given way to distractions in the time of prayer, or performed this duty slothfully. Secondly, to avoid telling such matters as have no connection with your sins; as being wholly superfluous and foreign to the purpose. Thirdly, not to reveal the guilt of any other person. And lastly, to make your confession entire, by declaring all your crimes, without disguise or concealment.

These points premised, being come to your confessor, kneel down, and making the sign of the cross, desire him to bestow his blessing on you; which he having granted, recite the *confiteor* as far as those words *through my most gracious fault*. There stop, and without any further preamble, begin in this manner; *since my last confession, which was a month, or a year ago, as that circumstance may be, I accuse myself of having done so or so, whatever you may have to mention*. And, having sincerely declared all you can recollect, according to the rules above, conclude by the following, or a similar attestation; *for these, and all my other sins, which I cannot call to mind, I am heartily sorry; I crave pardon of God for them, and penance and absolution of you my ghostly Father*: and then, after having finished the *confiteor*, lend an attentive and heedful ear to the instructions of your guide. And, while he pronounces the words of absolution, endeavour again to humble yourselves with all possible compunction.

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So far discharged however, you are not yet to conclude, my brethren, that this business is completed. After confession you should retire, and placing yourselves again in the presence of the Supreme Being, first, return him thanks for the great favour conferred upon you; secondly, renew your purposes and resolutions of amendment; reflecting on your obligation to shun all sin in future, and revolving again the means to correct your evil habits; and lastly, entreat the aid of heaven to enable you to fulfil your duties and make you superior to all temptations; not departing till you have implored forgiveness for the defects of both this and your former confessions, to be supplied through the abundant merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Thus have I led you, as it were, by the hand through every stage of this great work. It only remains to exhort you, Christians, to be diligent in the discharge of it. But this, I hope, is needless. You are satisfied, I make no doubt, that, to be deficient in any of its parts, is to render the whole abortive, and, in lieu of the intended blessing, to draw down a most heavy curse.

The difficulties, that accompany this undertaking, are unquestionably great. To explore the abyss of our corruption, and investigate the sources of human depravity is a task laborious and painful. To unmask our hypocrisy, which we would gladly, if possible, conceal from our own eyes, is a thing strongly repugnant and odious to nature. But, above all, to work ourselves up to a thorough change of heart, so as truly to hate what has long been the object of our fondest affections is an attempt, that far exceeds the abilities of man. Yet let no one despond. Let us ever reflect that, throughout this affair, our whole trust must be in God. The hardest rocks, at his command, become fountains of living water: and shall the stubborn heart of man be impenetrable to his grace?

Nor let the good will of the Deity questioned on this head. For, if any one can harbour a doubt of it, let him behold the solicitude, with which the good Shepherd seeks his lost sheep, and the gladness he betrays, in bringing it back to his fold. Let him see the father's tenderness, in going to meet his prodigal child, and the sentiments of affection, with which he welcomes him to his home. Let him hear the assurances he gives him, both by his prophets in the old law that, *if the sinner will return to him, he will certainly receive him*; and by his own Son in the new, who informs him *there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety-nine just*. In fine, if any thing be wanting to remove his uncertainty, let him recollect in what manner this God, in whom he diffides, treated, while on earth, the penitent Magdalen, the thief on the cross, and divers others sinners, that had recourse to his mercy. Shall not these proofs of the divine clemency be enough to excite his confidence in a Deity so compassionate, so gracious, so loving?

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Let them at least rouse you, my friends, to a sense of your obligations to him. And, whenever in future you feel the stings of conscience, have recourse to this God of mercy, according to the method I have here laid open to your view. Thus you will experience the sweets of a good conscience, and deserve to be associated with the party of the virtuous. Amen.

DISCOURSE XI.

GOOD-FRIDAY.

On the Passion of JESUS CHRIST.

They spoke of his decease, that he should accomplish in Jerusalem.

Luke ix. 31.

ALAS! my dear friends, what is the doleful cause, that to-day clothes our altars with mourning, that strikes the faithful with grief, and spreads terror throughout Christendom? The frame of nature is unhinged, and can we ask why? Why? Because the Lord of the creation is expiring. But what can be the occasion of such an unparalleled event? The guilt of mankind, which he undertakes to expiate. *He is wounded for our iniquities, and by his bruises we are healed.* Is. liii. 5. In a word, all that can be said of our divine Redeemer's passion is reducible to this; he remedies the disorders, sin had introduced into the world, by taking upon himself the punishment due to it.

For sin, observe, produces three very fatal disorders in the spiritual constitution; a disorder in the heart, which it corrupts; a disorder in the understanding, which it misleads; a disorder in the senses, which it warps from their allegiance to their stated laws: three disorders, that were not to be redressed, but by correspondent afflictions, viz. by sorrow, by confusion, by corporal sufferings; and this Christ effects by the mystery of his passion. He heals the disorder, sin had occasioned in our hearts; by giving up his soul a prey to sorrow, in the garden of Gethsemani. He heals the disorder,

it had occasioned in our understanding ; by being put to confusion at the different tribunals, he is cited to. Finally, he heals the disorder, it had occasioned in our senses ; by the sufferings of body, that he undergoes on mount Calvary. O eternal Father ! who, for our salvation, hast not spared even thy well-beloved son, grant that the sight of his torments may impress on us such sentiments, as the belief of them requires ; that, actuated by faith, we may in future devote ourselves to thee, to whom we will here address ourselves, in confidence of thy mercy.

Scarcely had Christ finished that last and mysterious supper, in which he was pleased to leave us the immortal pledge of his love ; when, knowing that the hour of our redemption was at hand, he goes, like an innocent lamb, to meet them that were to butcher him ; and repairs to the mount of Olives, where this tragic scene was to be opened. There, left to his grief and to the justice of the Deity, he atones, by the most bitter anguish of mind, for the empty enjoyments of the sinner, and the wretched satisfaction he finds in transgressing the law of God. *He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad.* Matt. xxvi. 37. A sorrow occasioned by three weighty considerations ; by the sight of our sins, by the prospect of his passion, by the view of the heavenly justice.

No sooner had this divine Saviour assented to the doom pronounced upon him, than his Father considers him as the object of his vengeance, as a man of sin, and a victim oppressed with the maledictions of the world. What a reflection, brethren, for a God, who is innocence itself !

Here, my friends, figure to yourselves your Redeemer musing on the horrors of past ages, and anticipating the view of those enormities, that would lay waste the times to come. And what does he see ? He sees an uninterrupted succession of crimes, from the guiltless blood of Abel, to the very consummation of iniquity. He sees a people, favoured by the Deity and made the depositaries of his promises, forsaking their Benefactor, to adore their own inventions. He sees the rest of the world blindly following the frenzy of their passions, and raising altars to every vice. If he casts his eyes on future ages, (on the intermediate space, I mean, between the above period and our degenerate days) a fresh subject of grief presents itself. He beholds his laws insulted, his blood trampled on, his gospel ridiculed or belied by most of them, that style themselves his followers. He beholds your sins and mine, brethren. In short, he beholds not only the wickedness of mankind, but their hardness likewise, their insensibility, their obduracy.

Imagine then, if you can, his deplorable condition, when he sees the foulness, and feels the pressure of this immense mass of guilt now laid upon himself. Alas ! he shudders at the sight ; he sinks under the load. Sorrow seizes him, and that unto death even,

And

And such, dear people, would be your grief also, did you but apply yourselves seriously to consider your sins. But, instead of this, scarce do you ever think of them : or when you do, is it not with a mind made up and familiarized to them ; with a mind, that sees nothing in them, but what is natural and common ? Is it a matter of surprize, then, that you are so little concerned about them ?

There is no affection of the mind, that has a more powerful influence on us than fear. Nor is there a condition more wretched, than that of a person, who, being condemned to death, is in hourly expectation of his lamentable fate. The apprehension of what awaits him is generally more dreadful than the punishment itself. Now, this anticipated view of his sufferings Christ experiences in the garden of Olives, where he feels beforehand the severity of his torments, and drinks deeply of the bitter chalice, which is then preparing for him. Here every circumstance of his passion offers to his notice. The treachery of Judas, the cowardice of his disciples, the perfidy of Peter, the injustice of his judges, the malice of the populace, the inhumanity of his executioners ; all these things at once are present to his eyes. During his passion his torments, will come singly and in succession ; but here they are all collected, and crowd upon him at the same instant ; so that his whole soul is absorpt in terror and dismay.

No longer is he that Son, so zealous for his Father's glory, and so desirous to accomplish the purpose of his coming. He is now a man of sin, who experiences our weakness ; a criminal, who trembles at the approach of his fate. Behold him prostrate on the ground, his eyes bathed in tears, and his arms stretched out in fervent supplication. And what is his petition ? *Father ! if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me.* But in vain : his Father is inexorable : whilst he himself, in universal agitation, can find no ease, either in the company of his Apostles, or in prayer, which he again and again has recourse to.

In this distressful situation, he three times conjures his Father to remove the chalice of his passion ; but is as often disregarded. Divine Father ! Is it thus thou treatest thy beloved Son ? Is it thus thou fulfill'st thy promise to glorify and exalt him ! What shall I say more, O God ! Shall this heavenly Saviour, to whom thou wast not wont to refuse any thing for his disciples, be able to obtain nothing for himself in his distress ? No, dear people, no favour shall he receive. The sentence of heaven is fixed and irreversible. At his coming into the world, he was condemned to die ; and from all eternity it was decreed he should not enter into his glory, but by the medium of sufferings.

Do you hear this, my friends ? Is not that sentence pronounced on us, still more than on Jesus Christ ? If the green would be thus used, what will become of the dry ? Is the servant above the master ? After this, shall we complain of the yoke, under which every child

of Adam is doomed to bend? Shall we murmur at the crosses, with which our path is strewn? Shall we think it hard that heaven turns a deaf ear to our petitions, when we solicit to be delivered from them? The example of Christ exposes our folly, and shews that our only remedy is to acquiesce in the will of God.

Such is the important lesson here taught us by our Redeemer. However severe the order of his Father, he submits to it without reserve. *Not my will, but thine be done.* Luke xxii. 42. A surprising exertion this. But the effect of it is not less so. For hence that sweat of blood, that issues immediately from all his pores, and stains the very ground, on which he lies prostrate in prayer.

Contemplate then your Saviour, brethren, and learn from the dreadful state, to which you see him here reduced, that there is no repugnance you are not obliged to conquer, when called by the voice of God. His will is often rigorous, I allow. It sometimes demands the most heart-felt sacrifices. But are these efforts equal to those of your Saviour? Cannot you accomplish the will of heaven without the effusion of your blood? Or, are the struggles, you meet with in the practice of its dictates, as trying as the pangs of Christ at the prospect of his passion? But, having seen how the Son of God, by the pangs of his interior, heals the disorder caused by sin in our heart, you shall next perceive him remedying, by his disgraces and humiliations, the disorder this same evil had occasioned in our understanding.

Man, forgetful of his origin and of that dust, from which he sprung, instead of humbling and debasing himself, entertained no other ideas, than those of his own greatness and importance. Who then shall open his eyes, and reconcile him to his Maker, of whom he affected to be independent? No one but Jesus, the model of the truly penitent; who, with this design, takes the way directly opposite to that, which sin had pointed out. The cause of the transgression of the first Adam was pride; wherefore the second Adam humbles himself to atone for the offence. But in what manner does he effect it? By taking upon himself the confusion, sin had merited. For which reason, he will now appear the outcast of mankind and a person *sated with reproaches.*

First, confusion on the part of his disciples, who betray, deny and abandon him. Secondly, confusion on the part of his judges, who condemn him without grounds. Thirdly, confusion on the part of the populace, who, besides atrociously insulting him, require him to be put to a death, the most ignominious then in use.

But, before we turn to Christ, exposed to shame by his Apostles, let us premise a reflection, that justly challenges our notice. You are told, dear people, and it cannot be too frequently inculcated, that every bent of the mind to vice leads to perdition, if not corrected,

rected ; and of this we have here a proof, that ought to put us on our guard. Judas was avaricious ; and whither did that spirit of covetousness, which he neglected to suppress at first, conduct him in the end ? He was avaricious ; and, from keeping the common purse, had contracted such a love of money that, to get at it, he formed the hellish scheme to sell the Son of God. Neither the character of Apostle, with which he had been vested ; nor the power, he had received, of working miracles ; nor the affection, Christ had shewn him, in feeding him with his body and blood, could divert him from his foul design. Satan besets his heart ; sacrilege confirms his impiety ; and from that moment he sticks at nothing. He projects the plan to apprehend his Maker's person, and advances boldly at the head of an armed multitude to seize and secure him. Neither the kindness, with which Christ receives him, nor the appellation of friend, with which he honours him, can prevent the miscreant from betraying his affectionate Lord, under the disguise of a sincere esteem. Shortly after, he is struck with a sense of his crime ; he returns the money, and repents. It is too late however : the die is cast : despair invades him ; and he puts the final seal to his damnation, by laying hands upon himself. Who can hear this, and not tremble at the very idea of indulging any vitious propensity ?

But Jesus Christ is not only betrayed by Judas ; he is also deserted by the other Apostles ; who, having neglected his advice to *pray and watch*, no sooner behold the mob approaching, than they disperse and run away. Let their misconduct be our warning, brethren. *The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.* Matt. xxvi. 41. Let us never cease to *watch and pray* ; and, by an unremitted diligence in these two points, let us prepare for those critical moments, that often endanger the strongest virtue.

Jesus Christ then is abandoned by his disciples. And, if Peter follows him, it is but to add to his confusion, and to deny him with imprecations. What a fall, O God ! The prince of the Apostles, the Vicar of Christ, the head of the Church is brow-beaten and over-powered by the voice of a servant maid. O man ! What art thou !

But let us accompany our Saviour to the dwelling-house of Caiphas. And what do we there behold, my friends ? The Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead arraigned at the bar of his presumptuous creatures ; the Holy of Holies accused of impiety ! We see there also imposture destroyed by imposture ; evidence contradicting evidence ; the whole council at a loss to cloud an innocence, whose lustre dazzles them. In this embarrassment, the High-Priest conjures him by the Sovereign Being to declare if he be truly the Son of God. But is it the desire of coming at the truth that suggests this question ? No, brethren. For scarce does Christ reply *I am*, than they cry out, with one voice, that he is guilty of blasphemy, and deserving of death. A most unjust sentence in the
mouths.

mouths of them, that pronounce it ; but most equitable in thy decrees, O Lord ! who dost condemn thy beloved to die : not because he is the son of God ; but because he is now become the Son of man ; and, in this capacity, is the victim of our crimes.

After such a condemnation, Christians, let us no longer be surprised to find the forms of justice, the dues of nature, the rights of humanity violated in regard to Jesus Christ. God himself, the most tender of parents, has condemned him ; and there is no humiliation he must not expect on the part of man. Hence an insolent servant is suffered to strike him, in the very presence of his Judges : he is given up to the soldiery, who make their sport of him, spit in his face, insult him as an impostor, and abuse him in a manner too shocking to be dwelt on.

But is not the prophecy, relating to his humiliations, fulfilled as yet ? No ; the blood-thirsty crowd will not be satisfied but with his life. To come at which, they hurry him, with the utmost brutality, to the house of Pilate, the governor of the city. A fresh subject of disgrace for Christ, who came to overturn the idols of paganism, to be himself put into the power of, and made over to a pagan. Yet observe, my friends ; he finds more justice, a greater degree of sensibility in this unenlightened heathen, than he does among the Priests and the Doctors of the law. Happy this infidel judge, if conscious as he was of the integrity of Jesus, he had exerted his authority in backing and supporting it. But no ; the apprehension of displeasing Cesar will not suffer him to think of it. In vain therefore does he send him to Herod, in order to screen him from the fury of the rabble. This impious Prince treats him as a fool ; neither condemning nor acquitting him. In vain does Pilate represent his innocence, and urge the solemnity of the Pasch. The insatuated Jews only answer him with the language of sedition, *crucify him, crucify him ; we will not have him, but Barabbas ; if you release him, you are not a friend to Cesar ; we care not for the consequences ; his blood be upon us, and upon our children.* Unhappy people ! Your desires are granted. This blood, so inhumanly spilt, shall fall upon you ; it shall call from the centre of the earth to demand vengeance on your guilty heads. Vagabonds, and dispersed over the globe, the objects of general detestation, you shall bear the tokens of your Deicide till the conclusion of time.

But here let us pause, dear people ; and not be so intent upon the perfidy of the Jews, as to lose the great instruction this degraded God affords us. At the view of the outrageous treatment he so unjustly receives ; (all his titles considered of a Prophet, a King, and the Lord of heaven and earth) let us confess that there is no injury we should not put up with ; no revenge we should not stifle ; no affliction that does not find its comfort ; no humiliation its equal in the passion of our Redeemer. But let us proceed to my last division ; in which you shall see Jesus Christ, by the sufferings he endures

endures in his body, healing the disorder sin had occasioned in our senses.

One of the principal inducements of a man to sin, was to gratify his palate. A forbidden fruit had awakened his desires; and he chose rather to yield to the solicitations of his consort, than obey his God, and deny his inclinations. Pleasure therefore was man's crime; and nothing but the sufferings of the Son of God could atone for it. Christ had already done too much to stick at what might follow. He had already sacrificed his peace of mind and honour; and now he prepares to make the grand sacrifice of his life. Wherefore, let us return to the Pretorium, where we left him among his enemies.

The disposition Pilate shews of saving Christ, has no other effect upon the populace than to inflame their desire of putting him to death. The house of the Governor rings with their clamours. Pilate is at a loss to know how to pacify them: but at length he decides, and condemns Jesus to the cruel and disgraceful punishment of flagellation.

But here, Christians, should I not do better to leave these awful mysteries to your own reflection, than to weaken them by a faint and inadequate description. Go then yourselves, go in spirit, to the foot of that pillar, to which your Deliverer is bound. Behold a band of soldiers discharging on his body all the efforts of their malice: a thousand repeated lashes make his flesh fly about in piecemeal, and leave nothing to be seen but the bared and uncovered bones. The strength of these ruffians is exhausted; but their barbarity is not satisfied. They press upon his head a crown of pointed thorns; they clothe him in derision with an old rag of purple; they give him a reed for a sceptre, and greet him on their knees, with the title of *King of the Jews*. O my Saviour! my adorable Jesus! Shall thy Royalty, which the heavens bow down to with respect, be thus mocked and insulted on this miserable earth? Shall thy unction of King, and High-Priest of the new alliance, which for us is a source of innumerable blessings, be thus made the object of profanation and impiety?

In this state Pilate produces him to the people; and raising his voice, *behold*, he says, *the man*. O ye heavens, be astonished at what ye now witness. See the God incarnate, announced by the prophets, the Saviour of mankind the Sovereign of the universe, mangled, vilified, and made an object of public horror! Ye celestial spirits, who came to adore him at his birth! Ye sages of the East, who prostrated yourselves before his cradle! Ye disciples, who fell flat at the sight of his transfiguration! Come and view that majestic countenance in its present condition. *Behold the man!* Yes, ye sinners! There is *the man* who has been wounded for your iniquities, who has been bruised for your crimes. There is your Saviour, your Redeemer, and your model. There is *the man*; and can you, Christians,

tians, hear it without shedding a pious tear for him? There, I say, is your work. *Behold the man.*

But to go on with our narration. Let us forget what has hitherto passed, and attend to the conclusion of this tragical scene. Jesus Christ is sentenced to death, and given up to the executioners. He is laden with his cross, which he affectionately embraces.

Christians, let us follow our Leader to this painful attempt, and take up our cross, after the example he sets us. This obligation is indispensable. Let us take it up with a good heart then, and carry it like Jesus. Let us carry it resolutely; although it should be our lot to meet with no sort of comfort; as he finds none, either in the aid of the Cyrenean, who is here compelled to help him; or in the compassion of the pious women that bewail his unhappy destiny. At length, however, by favour of the succour lent him, he arrives at the place of execution, spent with the heavy pressure of his enormous burthen. Let us follow the track of his bloody steps, and accompany him to Mount Calvary. But here, dear people, I own, my indignation shrinks back with terror, at the sight of the cruel torments preparing for this harmless victim.

Attend then, my friends, and see if there be sorrow like to his! Fury seems redoubled in the breasts of his executioners. They strip him of his clothes, which by this time have eat into and corroded his green wounds; and, by so doing, open them afresh, and flay him alive almost. They exert their whole strength to stretch his limbs upon the cross, and nail his hands and feet to it. They stir him about in this excruciating posture, and elevate him in the air. What more need I to say? At this moment Jesus Christ, the anathema of God and man is suspended on a gibbet. O my dear brethren! Could there be a sight more deserving of our tears, was not sin the sole occasion of this catastrophe, still more to be deplored?

Nevertheless, this torture, dreadful as it must be, is but a part of what our Saviour endures upon the cross. Every thing around him contributes to augment his misery, and adds to his affliction. On each hand of him is a thief, in whose crimes he seems a partner, as well as in their punishment. At his feet, his affectionate mother, whose grief increases his. On all sides of him a confused multitude, brought together by curiosity; an enraged mob, vomiting out blasphemies, and insulting him with the suggestions of their infernal malignity. No comfort amidst this accumulation of distress. If he asks for something to assuage his parching thirst, they offer him vinegar mixed with gall. If he turns his dying eyes to heaven, it is only there to see his Father, armed with the sword of justice; an inexorable Father, who will afford him no relief.

What then, O eternal Parent! dost thou await for, to put the last hand to this great sacrifice? Has not thy Son yet suffered enough? Is any thing wanting to complete the prophecies, or to expiate our sins? No, dear Christians, nothing is wanting: every thing is accomplished; and so assert the dying words of an agonizing

ing God. *It is consummated.* Yes, all is fulfilled on the part of Christ; the predictions, the promises, and the figures of the Old Testament. The justice of God is satisfied; the malediction effaced; the sentence of death abrogated; the body of sin destroyed; the devil confounded; paradise opened; the long interrupted commerce between heaven and earth renewed; the wall of separation thrown down, and the Jew and Gentile called alike to the divine inheritance. What, in short, shall I add? Man, ungrateful, perfidious man, is completely restored to the favour of his Maker.

And see already the effects of this inestimable blood. For scarcely is it spilt, but it makes its power known. The veil of the temple is rent; the rocks are split; the monuments are opened, and what is still more incredible, the most obdurate hearts are softened to compassion. The same people whom we heard so lately venting blasphemies against Christ, return home striking their breasts: and the very Centurion, who is ordered to attend the execution, proclaims aloud, that he is truly the Son of God. This avowal of a heathen shall be followed by the conversion of the Gentiles; and the cross, that had been hitherto a sign of infamy and disgrace, shall henceforth be an object of honour and respect. In a word, that prophetic declaration, which ensures universal empire to the adorable Jesus, is fulfilled in all its latitude.

Every thing is accomplished on the part of Jesus Christ then. But permit me to ask you, friends; is every thing accomplished on your part? Can you say that all is *consummated* in regard to your salvation? Yes, my dear people, you may say so with confidence, if you revere or love the cross; if you be determined to regulate your conduct by the direction of its pattern, and to tread in the steps of a suffering, an insulted, a crucified Divinity. If these be your sentiments, brethren, come with assurance and pay your tribute of veneration. Come and gather up the remains of that sacred blood which is here shed in your behalf, and partake of the merits of your merciful Saviour. But if, on the contrary, sin still reigns in you; if you be still addicted to intemperance, impurity, &c. why come you hither to shew respect to a cross whose virtues you wholly frustrate? Why pay to Christ an homage of form which your heart gives the lie to, and your conduct disclaims?

Wherefore, penetrated with the most lively grief, let us to-day humble ourselves profoundly before the sign of our redemption. For what can be better founded, Christians, than the emotions you now feel. You have been, as I may say, spectators of the death of a God incarnate. Encourage your just sorrow therefore. Strike, break to pieces that heart which has been accessory to the guilt.

Yes; may the nails that held my amiable Saviour on the cross, fasten me to it likewise. May the lance that opened his side, pierce my heart, and draw from it both the water of my tears, and the blood of my compunction. But, after all, dear people, we have less reason to weep for Jesus than for ourselves. Alas! if the inno-

cent was thus treated, because he took upon himself the semblance of the guilty, what must not the criminal expect from the atrocity of their wickedness? Let us not despond however: for Christ has left us, in his cross, an assured resource against the wrath of heaven; by the help of which we may escape the dangers that threaten to overwhelm us. His Father himself will be appeased if he sees us marching under the banners of this propitiatory standard.

Holy cross! we henceforth will choose thee for the portion of our exile. Be thou ever engraved upon our heart to expiate the relish of sin; ever stamped upon our understanding to expiate the pride of sin; ever impressed upon our body to expiate the pleasure of sin. May we live only in thee, by thee, and for thee. And, finally, may we have the consolation to expire in thy salutary embraces; that by thee we may be brought to the enjoyment of our sovereign good. Amen.

DISCOURSE

D I S C O U R S E XII.

P A L M - S U N D A Y.

On the Ceremonies of Holy Week.

What is the meaning of this service ? Exod. xii. 26.

WE are now my dear friends, arrived at the last week of Lent : a week justly distinguished by the epithet of *holy*, from the importance of the objects, it discloses to our view, and which are the matter of the solemn devotions of the Church on this occasion. I mean, as you must be sensible, the passion of the Son of God, which we are about to commemorate. The whole time of Lent indeed is designed as a preparatory season in which we ought to dispose ourselves for the celebration of these mysteries. But at present we are invited to give our attention to them in a more immediate and special manner. The office of the Church throughout the course of this week is remarkable for its ceremonies. In this regard there may be those perhaps who may censure her of folly. But, heedless of their strictures, she pursues her plan steadily. The death of the Author of life for the salvation of mankind, is a subject that will never fail to animate her gratitude. Nor will her endeavours ever be wanting to communicate the like spirit to them that will but listen to her advice. This is her sole view in the ceremonies she here displays ; viz. to exhibit, by representation, the sacred tragedy of her Spouse's sufferings. It cannot but be in character therefore, for those she has empowered to do it, to second her

her designs. On which grounds, in this discourse I will endeavour to point out the meaning of the ceremonies that are now about to occur, and the instructions to be gathered from them; after an application to the *Father of mercies*, through the merits of his Son, our persecuted Saviour.

Ceremonies, in a theological sense of the word, are actions made use of for the honour of God's service, and the edification of the faithful. I have no design here to enter on a minute explication of their institution or necessity. A dissertation of such extent, would be both foreign to my purpose, and incompatible with my leisure. Let it suffice to tell you briefly, that as to their institution, it is as ancient as man's existence, having been originally established by the Deity himself, at the time of the law of nature; afterwards confirmed by him under the settlement of the law of Moses; and, finally, supported by the practice of Jesus Christ, the Founder of the law of grace, of which we, Christians, are the subjects.

The law of nature exhibits altars raised, beasts sacrificed, and the ceremony of circumcision in general use among God's people. The history of the mosaïc institute affords an almost innumerable multitude of ceremonies; some of them ordained to make known the divine Majesty, some to prefigure the coming of the Messiah, and some to cleanse the people from the stains of their legal defilements. And as to our heavenly model, Christ Jesus himself, we find that he was circumcised, and presented in the temple; and that, when grown up, he submitted to the usual rites of going to the house of God, of performing the Pasch, &c. putting himself, in these respects, on a level with the other Jews: and, to instance in his practice, that in working his miraculous cures, he frequently made use of exterior things and signs. Witness the clay and spittle he applied to the eyes of the blind man in restoring him to his sight. Witness the prayer which in raising Lazarus from the dead, he made with lifted hands, and with various inflections and prostrations on the ground. Witness, in fine, the whole scene of that last and memorable supper, which he made with his disciples on the night previous to his death.

In the next place, dear people, as to the necessity of ceremonies, it appears to me a matter interwoven with our nature. For, considering our condition, that we are beings composed of a soul and of a body, both which must have a share in all our concerns, it seems wholly requisite there should be something visible, some characters or signs, whereby to distinguish and notify what we are doing. Without these it must be impossible to communicate our ideas; since our senses alone are the vehicles of our knowledge. But, if the operation of external objects be so essential in ordinary things, shall we suppose it to be less so in the case of religion? Should we not rather conclude, that a duty of such importance cannot be too well illustrated? and that no endeavours should be spared to make it clear and intelligible? For ceremonies are to the sight what words
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are to the hearing : and as the latter are requisite to convey our conceptions, so the former are necessary to elucidate our actions.

Devotion, it is true, brethren, is interior and spiritual. But the concurrence of external objects contributes highly to its impression ; by displaying in all its lustre the dignity of religion, and by raising the soul, groveling in the dust of the earth, to the contemplation of heaven and the prospect of eternity. For these reasons the Church, from the earliest state of Christianity, has ever made use of ceremonies in the worship of the Supreme Being. Those, appropriated to this week, relate principally to the passion and death of the world's Redeemer. And this, as the most respectful and interesting of her mysteries, she is ambitious to delineate with the greatest perspicuity.

On Passion-Sunday, Christians, which was last Sunday, she covers her crucifixes, veils her alterpieces, and omits some of the usual solemnities in the sacrifice of the Mass : to denote that the time, she is now commencing, is a time of mourning and grief ; a time devoted to sorrow for the sufferings of the Son of God ; and that, to prepare to commemorate them in a manner worthy of his love, we must begin by lamenting and detesting our sins, the true cause and origin of all his afflictions.

With the present Sunday she opens the tragical scene of his passion. The very name, which it bears, declares the ceremony of the day. For it is denominated Palm-Sunday, from an ancient usage of the Church of solemnly blessing palms, or something of a like nature, and distributing them to the people. The meaning of which ceremony is obvious and plain. On the sixth day prior to his passion, our divine Saviour, Jesus, made his last entry into Jerusalem, amidst the acclamations and shouts of the populace ; who, hearing that he was come into the neighbourhood of the city, went out to meet and welcome him among them. To do him the greater honour and express the veneration, in which they held him at the time, some of them cut down branches, which they bore in their hands, or strewed in the road ; others offered him their garments, or spread them on the ground ; and all, with one voice, sung aloud, *Hosannah in the highest ; blessed is he, who cometh in the name of the Lord ; Hosannah to the Son of David.* Mark xi. 10. In memory of this his triumph therefore, the Church orders palms, or something similar to be blessed, and to be carried by the faithful in their hands on this day, which is the sixth before that, on which we celebrate his death.

From the origin of this ceremony, we may learn the just value, we ought to set upon the applause and commendations of the world. For what, my friends, can shew their insignificancy more clearly than the inconstant behaviour of the Jews on this occasion ? The very same people, who, on this day, sung Hosannah to, and proclaimed Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, the Son of David, within the space of a few days, cry out as loudly, *take him away, take him*

him away ; crucify him, crucify him. John xix. 15. What instances do we daily witness of a like mutability ? How often do we find the persons, who, to-day, stand the highest in the estimation of the public, to-morrow pulled to pieces, and made the objects of the basest censure ?

Moreover, brethren, these palms afforded us a second lesson, of no less consequence than the foregoing one. They are the emblems of Christ's victory over his enemies, sin and death ; they should also then be the tokens of our triumph over these powers, which are no less hostile to us than they were to our Deliverer. It will avail us little that he, by the benefit of our redemption, has restored us to the liberty of grace and to the title of the sons of God, if we permit ourselves, by continuing in sin, to be still enslaved to the tyranny of hell, and the children of the devil. Wherefore, on receiving the blessed palms, let their intimation inspire us to combat resolutely, till death, in the cause of God and our salvation.

The whole subject of the lessons, which the Church reads during this week, is the passion of Jesus Christ, and the prophecies relating to it : to excite us to consider seriously what our Saviour has done for us, that we may learn, at least, in some measure, the greatness of his love, and the obligations we have to him. The same is the purport of the evening-office on the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. This office, you know, dear people, is usually called *tenebræ* ; a word, that signifies *darkness* ; because, by the time it comes to a conclusion, all the lights are found extinguished ; in memory of that obscurity, which overspread the face of the globe, while Christ was hanging on the cross. They are put out one by one ; to signify that the light of spiritual comfort vanished gradually from the breasts of his holy mother and the disciples, through the progress of their Master's sufferings. The last remaining candle is concealed under the altar ; to represent the temporary extinction of the true light of the world, our Redeemer, in his sepulchre. Lastly, the noise, this office ends with, denotes the splitting of the rocks, the rending of the veil of the temple, and that earthquake, which convulsed the frame of nature at his death.

Munday-Thursday takes its name from the latin word *mandatum*, the first word of the Antiphon, which is sung that day in Churches, where the Prelates begin the ceremony of washing their people's feet : a ceremony, that you must know, is instituted in imitation of Jesus Christ, who was pleased, at the last supper, to wash the feet of his apostles. This feast is ordained in memory of that sacred night, in which our Redeemer bequeathed to us the adorable sacrament of his body and blood ; previously to his retiring to the garden of Olives, where, soon after, his passion commenced by the most extraordinary symptoms. In catholic countries, from the *Gloria in excelsis* of the Mass of this day to that on Easter-eve, the public bells are mute ; to intimate that all nature should now be hushed, to bemoan in silence the doleful sorrows of her agonizing Author.

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The altars are uncovered likewise, and stripped of their decorations, to represent, by anticipation, the Son of God hanging naked on the bare altar of the cross. The blessed sacrament, which on this day is consecrated for the use of the following, is deposited in a place prepared for its reception, commonly called a sepulchre; to denote the burial of Jesus Christ in the monument of Joseph. Hither, my friends, all those, that have any compassion for his sufferings, will repair to condole with him, and sympathize in his fate.

Good-Friday is the commemoration of that most august and respectful day, on which the greatest effort of heavenly mercy, the brightest mystery of divine love, the redemption of mankind was consummated by the sacrifice of a God upon the cross. To express our reverence to this cross, so highly honoured by our Deliverer, and to shew our love for him, who, through an excess of love for us, resigned his breath upon it, it is usual with us, on this day, to kneel and kiss it with respect. But let no one, Christians, mistake the meaning of this ceremony. Let no one imagine that, while he prostrates to the crucifix, he is desired to adore it; i. e. to give it any portion of that honour, which is due to God alone. Such an attempt would be a blasphemy, no less shocking to reason than to the principles of religion. Nothing but ignorance, or a wish to misrepresent things, could have ever branded this custom with so odious an imputation. However, for our comfort, we are assured the respect, we pay to the cross both on this and other occasions, is not only founded on reason, but authorized by antiquity, and supported by the practice of the most pious and enlightened personages, the world has yet known. All that is designed by the use of this ceremony is to shew our veneration and regard for the cross; not for any inherent merit, observe, or excellence of its own; but from the relation, which it bears to our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. He was pleased to choose it for the instrument of his death, the altar of his sacrifice, and the trophy of his victory. He has set it up as the pledge of our redemption, the memorial of our salvation and the monument of his love. And can we think we do too much by keeping it in view, and revering it for his sake?

These, dear people, are the motives that induced the Church to profess such a singular respect for this sign, from the purest ages of Christianity. A respect, to be referred to him, I say, who has so eminently distinguished it. A respect, which thus directed, as it ought to be, to Christ, declares our faith in his person, excites our hope in his merits, and kindles in our breast the fire of his sacred charity. Finally, a respect, which is inculcated by the voice of reason, as of religion. For, as the impulse of affection often leads us to set a value on what has belonged to a friend; so, if the remembrance of Jesus Christ be interesting to our feelings, his cross, the emblem of his sufferings, will surely recommend itself to our attention and esteem. How deeply these impressions were engraved on the great St. Paul his own words will testify. *God forbid that I should*

should glory, he says, *save in the cross of Jesus Christ*. Galat. vi. 14. To glory in a thing is to revere it, to love it, to make it our chief happiness. If such were the sentiments of this illustrious Apostle, this *vessel of election*, let us never be ashamed, my friends, to entertain the like. Never let us blush to walk in the footsteps of a Saint, so privileged by heaven.

Holy-Saturday concludes the solemnities of the passion. In the Mass of this day the Church resumes her *alleluias*; which, being used at other times as the expressions of festivity, had been dropped and suspended during the penitential season of Lent. As this is the eve of Easter, and the vigil of that glorious day, on which, victorious over the powers of hell, Christ raised himself from the dead, it is but just the happy news should be announced with the tokens of joy. The paschal candle, blessed on this occasion, expresses the new light of spiritual comfort, the Son of God brought us at his resurrection. The Church orders it to be lighted at the beginning of the gospel, and to be left burning till the end of the communion, during the whole of the paschal time; i. e. from Easter-Sunday to the day of the Ascension, when our Saviour entirely quitted the earth: to figure to us the divers apparitions, or manifestations of his person, which during that space of time, Christ made to his disciples. The triangular candle, which is likewise made use of in the course of this day's ceremonies, intimates to us that this same evangelical light is the work of the united Trinity; to whom we are to render thanks for it and the tribute of our acknowledgment.

Such are the chief ceremonies of the week, we are now beginning, brethren. Ceremonies, intended evidently to be as so many speaking and acting pictures, to delineate the different stages of our divine Redeemer's sufferings; from the day of his entering Jerusalem in triumph to that, from which we date our happiness, of his resurrection from the grave in glory. The best method, you can take therefore to consecrate to God a time, which is so particularly distinguished, is to accompany the Church in the celebration of these mysteries. To do which, let us endeavour to make the passion of Jesus Christ the sole matter of our devotion. This indeed is an object, Christians, we should at all times have in sight; a consideration, we ought to reflect upon every day of our lives. But to overlook it at present, or discharge this obligation in a cold and tepid manner, must certainly argue us guilty of the most criminal ingratitude. The Author of nature, the incarnate Word of the Deity, by an exertion of his love, which for all eternity must appear stupendous and incomprehensible to men and angels, subjects himself, for our sake, to a course of sufferings without example; and can we be so ungrateful as to slight his ineffable charity? Can we be so obdurate as to refuse a pious tear to the memory of his distressful passion? Far from every christian breast be so base an insensibility! For our part, my dear people, let us strive to entertain a just sense of



of his infinite goodness, and thus address ourselves to him in the dictates of the most lively gratitude.

Jesus, our dear Redeemer! what return shall we make to thee for thy innumerable favours? Not content with having created us and raised us into existence, thou must also give thy life, to rescue us from the jaws of hell. To render thee due thanks is beyond our weak abilities. Inspire, we therefore entreat thee, all the powers of earth and heaven, to unite their joint endeavours in supplying our deficiency. And grant that the remembrance of thy excessive charity may be ever present to our eyes, and imprint deeply on our hearts the most affectionate and sincere devotion; that, actuated by its direction, it may be our solace in this life, and our felicity in the next. Amen.

D I S C O U R S E XIII.

On the Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST.

He is risen, as he foretold. Matt. xxviii. 6.

WHAT St. Bernard says respecting the nativity of St. John the Baptist is equally applicable to the present festivity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; "many will rejoice on this solemnity; but I wish it may be on the account of the solemnity, and not on the score of vanity." There may possibly be those among you, Christians, who rejoice, because on this occasion they put on their best attire. This would be to rejoice from a principle of vanity, and not of devotion to the day. Others perhaps may be glad because the season of lent is finished, and its abstemial rigours expired with it. Such a joy would be a sensual joy, entirely unconnected with and foreign to this mystery. The sole object of our gladness, on the solemnity now before us, should be the solemnity itself; in which we behold the Son of God entering upon a new life, a life glorious, triumphant and immortal.

This, my friends, is the cause, that gives birth to the gladness of the Church, and impels her to join her voice with the heavenly Spirits, in exclaiming at the wonderful sight, *he is risen as he foretold.* To this grand subject therefore of the Christian's joy I will here beg leave to call your attention. The matter is certainly of great importance, and such, as forbids the ministers of God to be silent on a question

question so essential to religion. But, as the opportunity of enlarging on so extensive a topic, is not a little obstructed by the business of the season, much cannot be expected. However, as far as leisure will permit me, I will here endeavour to lay before you the heads of this memorable event, which supports the whole fabric of our venerable system; first soliciting the grace of heaven, as becomes our insufficiency.

Among all the mysteries of our divine institute, dear people, there is perhaps not one that we find so much difficulty in assenting to, as this of the resurrection. The truth of what I here assert St. Paul experienced fully at the first opening of his mission. For, on delivering the principles of Christianity to the heads of the city of Athens, convened in Senate with this intent, he was listened to with a profound attention for some time. But, when he came to touch upon this article of the resurrection from the dead, he was almost universally derided, and his further hearing postponed. For which reason the Son of God was desirous to prove his resurrection by evidence so clear, so authentic, so unquestionable, as to set it beyond the possibility of a doubt, in the conception of every one capable of reasoning on a matter of fact. To judge how far he has succeeded in the attempt, I need but lay before you the relation of the Evangelists. Hear then what they say upon the subject now before us, brethren.

Joseph of Arimathea, having asked permission of the Governor to bury the body of Jesus, lately crucified, Pilate sends for the centurion or captain of the company of soldiers who had attended the execution. Of him he enquires whether the person in question be as yet dead. The centurion assures him that he is; that he himself saw him expire, and that one of the soldiers under his command, had, with a lance, laid his side open in his presence. Upon this, leave is given to inter him; and Joseph, assisted by Nicodemus, unnailed him from the Cross, and embalms him with a compound of myrrh and aloes which he had brought with him for the purpose. This ceremony finished, they proceed to bury him, wrapping up the body in two clean winding sheets; covering his face, and tying his hands with a third, according to the method of interment in use among the Jews. They then deposit his remains in a new monument; a monument in which no other body had yet been laid, and hewed out of the stubborn surface of a rock; and to secure the entrance to it more effectually, they place before it a large and ponderous stone. Presently after this, the Priests and Pharisees repair to Pilate, and tell him, that the impostor, whom he had lately sentenced to death, was wont to boast, that within the space of three days he would restore himself to life. Wherefore, for fear his disciples should steal away the body, and give out to the world that he was risen again, they petitioned the governor to have it guarded. Pilate consents to their request, and a party of soldiers is placed over the sepulchre:

and, to add still more to the security of the place, and put it beyond the power of artifice as well as violence to attempt it with a prospect of success, they close it with the seal belonging to their order. On the dawn of the third day, an Angel, clothed in white, and brighter than the stars, removes the huge stone from the door; seats himself upon it, and grievously alarms the guard, both by his visible appearance to them, and by the earthquake that attends him. The holy women, arriving immediately after sun-rise, find him still sitting on the stone, and are informed by him that Jesus is risen from the dead, and no longer in the monument where he had lately been deposited. All which passes in the presence of the soldiers, as they themselves relate to thunder-struck Pharisees.

If not a leaf falls to the ground but by the ordinance of the Deity, the whole of this transaction must surely have been conducted by the special direction of his providence. For to examine this account of it, my friends; can we conceive any thing better calculated to stop the mouth of incredulity, and obviate the charges and objections of human reasoning? But, dear people, I will not here presume to trespass on your time, by combating the difficulties that may be started in opposition to this mystery. For I am speaking now to Christians, who require, I hope, no other proof for their belief than the word of God. This you have heard; and, abstracting from the infallibility of its Author, must allow it, even in the eye of reason alone, to be convincing to every thing but the most consummate and rooted wilfulness. Wherefore, on this anchor of faith we will rest secure; leaving the incredulous to work his way through the labyrinth and mazes of his specious, deceitful sophistry.

On the third day therefore, brethren, (which on this account we now celebrate as one of the chief solemnities of the year) the soul of our divine Saviour, returning to its forsaken corpse, reanimates, and restores it to the vital functions it enjoyed previously to its dissolution. But why do I say restores it to those functions? To speak more accurately, I should say restores it to life, and communicates to it, in a superlative degree, the glorious qualities that await the bodies of the just in a future state.

Here then is the gladsome occasion, friends, that on this distinguished day diffuses universal joy; to see the body of our Deliverer, on which the rancour of his enemies has exhausted its barbarity beyond the reach of their malevolence: to behold this sacred body, which their insatiable malignity had brought to *the lower pit*, even to the dark and gloomy caverns of the dead, triumphant over all their efforts. What christian heart can be so steeled as to be insensible to this joyful event? Let those at least, whose commiserating bosoms have lately sympathized with their Jesus, and whose condoling piety has contributed to dry up the tears of his agonizing sorrows; let all such, I say, *rejoice* on this occasion, and be truly glad. Their Jesus is now risen: nay he is in the glory of his Father
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even. Philip. ii. 11. " Admitted to a seat with his eternal Father, says St. Leo, he is now associated with him in glory, as man, whose nature he was partaker of from all eternity, as God." This is the glory, which, on the eve of his death, he petitions for in these words; *glorify me, O Father! with thyself, with the glory I had with thee before the world was.* John xvii. 5.

And this same glory, my dear people, he now obtains in all its plenitude. His sacred humanity, for which alone he begs it, is completely vested with it. The infirmities of our corruption thrown aside, behold him now impassible, incorruptible, and immortal. *He dies no more; death shall no longer have dominion over him.* Rom. vi. 9. What another extensive opening for the joy of every Christian! to see his Redeemer, previously to this event, tributary to death, like himself, now trampling on its hoary terrors, and triumphantly soaring on the wings of immortality. Oh my friends! indulge your gladness freely at this sight, and join with the Church in proclaiming aloud, *he is risen, as he foretold; rejoice and be glad.* Or if you be so wrapped up in yourselves, and in the pursuits of your own interest, that nothing else can make you feel; know, brethren, that still you have reason, and great reason too, I add, to rejoice on this solemnity.

For he, who is now risen from the dead, is your leader, who came from heaven to conduct you thither. He is your head, of whose mystical body you yourselves are the living members. St. Paul styles him *the first fruits of the dead.* 1 Cor. xv. 20. The first fruits of a tree promise a further succession; and the glorious resurrection of the Son of God ensures to his servants their future resurrection also. And such indeed is the consequence the holy Job deduces from it, in that prophetic declaration; *I know that my Redeemer liveth; and that, on the last day, I likewise shall be risen from the earth.* Job xix. 25. Again, according to the Apostle, *he is risen for our justification;* Rom. iv. 25. i. e. to sanctify us, to apply the merits of his redemption to our souls, and to be at once the efficient, the exemplary, and the final cause of our resurrection. To this great privilege of ourselves, we certainly have no title. The sole merits of our Saviour have earned it for us, and on these alone can we found our claim to that eternity of happiness, which through him we may expect and confidently aspire to.

Behold, he says, *I appoint to you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed to me.* Luke xxii. 29. A valuable and inestimable gift! I dispose of my kingdom in your favour; but on terms similar to those on which I myself received it from my Father. Surely, Christians, it is worth our while here to enquire what the conditions are on which we are to be honoured with so noble a present; and St. Paul will make us acquainted with them. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death; even the death of the cross. Wherefore, (and observe the wherefore, brethren) God also hath exalted him.* Philip ii. 8. These then are the terms of our future claim to happiness.

piness. These conditions we must subscribe to in full, or forfeit all pretensions to the offer made to us; viz. we must be humble, we must be obedient, and we must be mortified.

A christian humility consists in ever forming a mean opinion of ourselves; in degrading ourselves in our own eyes beneath every one; in being kind and affable to all, our lowest inferiors not excepted; in rejecting the desires of being distinguished from our fellow-members; in being willing to be overlooked, held cheap, and disregarded. Such, dear people, is the humility we must practise if we hope to be made partakers of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. *He humbled himself*: this is the first condition. *Becoming obedient unto death*: behold a second. He forbids us to swear, to indulge our vicious inclinations, and to injure any one living. He commands us to keep holy the sabbath, to obey our parents, to love our neighbour for his sake, and himself above all things. To refuse obedience to these, or any other among the articles which he prescribes for our observance, is wilfully to exclude ourselves from the mercy he holds out to us. For none will he save; none can he save but the obedient.

Nor can any of his commands surely be so offensive to human nature as it is to die. Yet to this even he has deigned to submit, through pure obedience: *becoming obedient unto death*. But it is not death, my friends, he requires of us. It is self-denial, it is mortification, it is restraint only. To suppress the natural propensity of our inclination to evil. To curb the sallies of a perverse heart, and model its desires according to the dictates of his ever sacred will. To deny ourselves, not only whatever is positively inconsistent with his law, but also such things as have no tendency, in some shape or other at least, to promote his honour, or our neighbour's welfare; as for instance, a fondness for the vanities of life; a habit of squandering away our time in sitting, gaming, or fashionable amusements; such things, in fine, as wholly occupy the children of the world, whose employments are as fleeting and as transitory as itself. Such, brethren, are the sacrifices this heavenly Saviour demands of us.

They therefore, that desire to have a share in his resurrection, and the immortal bliss he offers to them, must first die with him to all these things. *If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Christ*. Rom. vi. 8. In short, they must, like him, be obedient, not only unto death, but unto the death of the cross even.

Now, crucifixion, if you please to observe, dear people, is a punishment that no one can inflict upon himself; it requires the aid and concurrence of at least one other person. The fasts, the watchings, the penances of all kinds, which we may impose upon ourselves, are meritorious, it is true, and acceptable to the Supreme Being. But still they are inadequate to make us perfectly conformable to our crucified Redeemer. That our resemblance to him may be complete, we must submit with patience to the injuries we receive

ceive from others; whether ignorance or malice, inadvertency or design, be the source from whence they spring. Bear then with the surly humour of a husband, with the fretful temper of a wife, with the untoward disposition of a step-mother, with the disobedience of a child, with the calumny gone abroad to your prejudice, or the loss you may sustain by having your property withheld from you. These, and every thing of a like nature, are your crosses. Take them up cheerfully therefore, and carry them with Jesus unto death.

If we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall also be planted in the likeness of his resurrection. Rom. vi. 5. A resemblance in the one regard will infallibly produce a resemblance in the other.

In return for your humility and contempt of worldly grandeur, God will give you a body glorious and endued with every imaginable beauty.

In reward for your obedience to the commandments of the Lord, you shall receive from him a body obedient to the soul, subtle, refined, and entirely spiritual.

In recompense for your mortifications, your body shall become impassible, exempt from all infirmities, unalterable and immortal.

Finally, in remuneration for your crosses and sufferings, you shall be blessed with a body active, light, free as the air, and uncontrollable as the wind; a body, which in an instant will transport you from pole to pole, from earth to heaven. To say nothing of the essence of felicity, which is the beatitude of the soul; and which consists in the vision and enjoyment of the Divinity, our sovereign good, with which moreover you shall be rewarded throughout a boundless eternity. Amen.

D I S C O U R S E XIV,
E A S T E R - M O N D A Y.

On the RESURRECTION of JESUS CHRIST.

Christ rising from the dead, dieth now no more. Rom. vi. 9.

HOW different the present sight, my friends, from that we have lately witnessed! We have seen the powers of earth and hell in league against our heavenly Saviour. To-day, however, the scene is changed. The persecuted Jesus triumphs in his turn; and triumphs with so much splendour, that the boasted victory of his enemies only terminates in their greater confusion. They put him to death: he restores himself to life. They shut him up in a darksome monument: he opens it in spite of them. In vain do they attempt to secure his sepulchre by a military guard, by a public seal, by every precaution, in short, their enthusiasm can dictate. In defiance of them all, Christ appears again, and shews them he is the man their prophets pointed at, when they foretold that he should be *free among the dead*: Pf. 87. so free as completely to disarm that merciless tyrant, not only for a time, but for ever. *Christ rising again dieth now no more.*

It is not my intention, Christians, here to labour to evince the resurrection of the Son of God. This is a fundamental article of our faith; the only proof, I presume, it needs to recommend it to your belief. What I purpose now to exhort you to is, to enter, as far as possible, into a plan of a spiritual resurrection; and to take
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up the resolution to live henceforth in such a manner, by grace, as to die no more by sin. Wherefore, I will here confine myself to three reflections that shall form the whole of this discourse. In the first, I will endeavour to give you an idea of what it is to be risen from the death of sin to the life of grace. In the second, I will shew you the happiness of such a resurrection. And in the third, I will observe in what the stability and permanencé of this kind of life consists; imploring the light of God's directive spirit with this view.

That I may impress on you a just idea of a life resuscitated from sin to grace, let me note to you, dear people, the two circumstances that are the most remarkable in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first of which is, that he triumphed over death completely. Whence St. Paul infers, that we must die to every species of sin. The second is, that he is risen, to lead a new life in future. Whence the same preceptor concludes, that the life of grace must also be a new one.

To die to sin, then two things are indispensably requisite. We must hate sin; and we must use our best endeavours to relinquish it.

We must hate sin, I say, my brethren: but how? With a true and sincere hatred; and in such a manner as David did, when he said he not only *bated sin*, but that he *he held it in abomination*. Ps. cxviii. *I have laboured in my groanings. Every night I will wash my bed, I will water my couch with my tears.* Ps. 6. Here is the model of a true sorrow. This is the light in which the mother of the renowned St. Lewis considered sin, when she told him, that, tender as her maternal love was, she would rather see him stript of his dominions, and reduced to the extreme of misery, than commit one mortal sin. And you, my friends, how light do you make of it? Mortal sin makes you enemies of God; and you are as easy about it, as if it was a thing of no sort of consequence. A hatred of sin is necessary then, in order to die to it. But this alone will not suffice.

No, Christians, it will not. To hate sin is indeed the beginning of a conversion: but besides this, exertions, and powerful exertions too, are requisite to extricate ourselves from its hold. St. Augustine lays it down as an incontestable maxim, that we cannot say with truth we are sorry for our offences, while we wilfully repeat them. The sincerity of our grief can only be attested by the reformation of our life. Now, to effect this, strong and forcible exertions will be necessary. You desire perhaps to be transformed from sinners into saints at once. But the nature of the thing forbids it; at least without a miracle, which you can have no reason to expect. Your most strenuous endeavours therefore, I say, are here demanded; and these must be principally levied at the occasions of your sins. The Wise-man tells you, that *he who loves the danger shall perish in it*: Eccles. iii. 17. and Christ, speaking on the same subject, expresses himself

himself in this manner ; *if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.* Matt. xviii. 9.

These words of our divine Master then inform us amply that we must not spare ourselves ; but that, on the contrary, we must be disposed to break off from all the occasions of sin, how dear soever they may be. We must, without demur, pluck out this *right eye* ; that is to say, we must abandon that person's company, which is so pleasing to us ; those amusements, in which the hours glide off so smoothly ; that ale-house, to which our steps conduct us imperceptibly almost from habit. These things are so many *right eyes*, as it were, that must necessarily be *plucked out and cast away* ; since they are a constant source of scandal to us. For, in the language of the scripture, every thing is scandal, that leads to sin. Now, this company, those diversions, and in particular, that tippling-house induce you to offend the Deity. For, to do credit to truth and speak sincerely ; do you ever frequent such places, without committing many sins, by swearing, by quarrelling, by spending on intemperance and excess that money, which is wanted for the support of your wives and families ? *Pluck out this right eye then, whatever it may be, and cast it from you.*

Here therefore you see the violence, that must be used to separate from the occasions of sin at all events. The difficulty of doing it will never be admitted as a plea for an opposite conduct. Take care, dear people, lest your continuance in any occasion of this nature should cost you far more ; your souls, I mean, your salvation, your eternity.

In the epistle, read on this solemnity, St. Paul explains in what the new life, which every Christian is now summoned to enter upon, consists. *If you be risen with Christ, seek the things, that are above ; not the things, that are on earth.* Coloss. iii. 1. In which doctrine the Apostle establishes two very material articles ; first, that we must be disengaged from the things of the earth ; and secondly, that we must aspire with fervour to those of heaven.

But when I assert, my friends, that the new and spiritual life, you are called to, consists in being detached from the concerns of the world, I do not mean to say that you must relinquish your possessions or employments ; as if you could not licitly retain or follow them. For, doubtless, you may lawfully attend to such affairs, and apply the profits of them to your wants. But what is prohibited is to settle your affections on them. For, as Christ says, if our treasure be on earth, our hearts will be there also. And what can be understood by storing up our treasures on earth ; but giving our attention to the enjoyments of this life, and leaving the great business of eternity to chance and hazard ?

Reflect, dear Christians, on the industry you have already exerted for this world, and the backwardness you have hitherto shewn for the things of futurity. Why these anxious pains, this restless labour ?

labour? For a trifling interest, a petty gain. God forbid that I should censure you for working. So far from it, I tell you you would be highly blameable, did you attempt to live in idleness. But what I recommend is that you would strive to raise your views higher, and take care that your principal endeavour be to obey God, to expiate your sins and to acquire a right to heaven, which is the second point St. Paul inculcates.

And here, brethren, to give you the description of a Christian, that is truly risen. He is a man, created a-new in righteousness and justice; who already lives in the regions above, by faith; who has no principle of action but charity, no rule but the gospel, no aim but eternity. The ardour of his zeal makes him, as I may say, a man of all times and places. His fervour ranks him with the faithful of the primitive Church: his observance of discipline numbers him with the present Church: his hope associates him with the Church to come. The fall of the righteous afflicts him: the repentance of the sinner gives him joy. With the weak he is weak: with the glad he is glad. No event is indifferent to him: no scandal unfelt. His desires are above the earth: his virtue above mediocrity. Like those generous Israelites, who, in building the house of God, held the sword in one hand, and the trowel in the other, he is occupied incessantly in combating with hell, and advancing the work of heaven. He rears the superstructure of christian charity upon the ruins of concupiscence. He is continually labouring to root up vice, and implant virtue; never idle; never at rest.

Do you now yourselves by this mirror, my friends? Does the reflection resemble you? And can you still be flattered with the thoughts of feeling that glowing ardour, which inflamed the hearts of the Apostles, and was the glory of the first believers? The utmost stretch of our modern conversions is to avoid atrocious crimes, and steer clear of public censure. But be not deluded, brethren. All the exertions of a Christian, risen to the life of grace, must be directed towards heaven. Prayer, instructions, the frequentation of the sacraments, these, and the like, will be his most pleasing occupations. But to proceed to my second point.

The advantages we reap, dear people, from the resurrection of Jesus Christ are manifest. For, besides that it assures us he is God, immortal, and the conqueror of death; it likewise informs us that this his resurrection is the cause and principle of our own. For as the heavenly Father made use of the sacred humanity of his Son, to accomplish our redemption; so was his resurrection the necessary instrument of ours, as well as its most finished model. But, among the many benefits we receive by the resurrection of our Saviour, a principal one is that it completely establishes the veracity of our sacred institute.

And, in fact, dear Christians, this is the point, in which both the miracles of the Apostles and their exhortations all centre. St.
Paul

Paul declares aloud that, without the certainty of this mystery, it is in vain to announce the gospel ; and, that, if Christ be not risen from the dead, we are the most absurd of all mankind. As, on the other hand, its authenticity admitted, we are the most prudent and sagacious : since it is at once the firm support of our faith, and the sure foundation of our hope.

But, to mention what should come more home to you ; something, that ought more effectually to convince you of the advantage of adhering closely to the cause of God, after having once embraced it : in these happy days of your spiritual resurrection, you have tasted how sweet the Lord is to them, that love him. But, if these first moments of reconciliation are attended with so great a pleasure, how delightful must be a life uninterruptedly devoted to him ? The Saints experienced it. God alone was the object of their search ; and in him they found such sweets, as to be astonished by what means their transports could be allied to the miseries of the present state. Try it yourselves, my friends. In returning to your Jesus, you are already returned to the fountain-head of bliss. Fear not the repetition of its draughts should ever cloy you. Every day attach yourselves more closely to this divine source ; and you will soon be inebriated with the plenty of his benedictions, that fill the hearts of such as love him with sincerity. But, to come to the last and most important point of this discourse, which I term the stability or permanence of a spiritual life.

Persevere, my beloved, said St. Paul to the Corinthians, in the pious practices, you have had the happiness to be made acquainted with. Persevere, I likewise say to you, dear people, in the exercises of prayer, of good works, of religious duties, &c. These are the sure means to acquire the knowledge of the Deity, like the disciples going to Emmaus. These the salutary springs, from which you may draw those waters of grace, that will flow unto eternity, without diminution. I hope for every thing for such among you, brethren, as I see approach to the sacraments : and, on the contrary, I fear every thing for those, that keep themselves at a distance from them. If at any time, with a view to try your fidelity, Christ seems to forsake you as he pretended to do, in regard to the above disciples ; oblige him, if I may dare so express myself, to stay with you, as they did. Although indeed we never can be drove to this extremity. For at all times he most willingly holds out his grace to us ; or, at least, he grants it to our humble prayers, without delay. Abandon not your God, I say, my friends ; and be assured that your God will never abandon you.

But what are the means to render our resurrection durable and permanent ? Preserve, I reply, at all times the dispositions, that have already been productive of your conversion. And how is this to be effected ? By recurring to those principles, I answer, that have already been instrumental to it. These principles are unchangeable ; for they are the truths of eternity, that allow of no alteration.

tion. For which reason, the dispositions founded on them should be equally invariable. They were not more forcible, when they operated to your conversion: nor will they be less so, when they lose their influence over your minds. It always will be true that Christ is risen from the dead: always certain that you must rise with him: always indisputable that you cannot partake of his glory, unless you model your repentance upon the plan he has traced out for you at his resurrection. These principles being uniformly the same, the dispositions, they inspire, must ever be similar. For the same cause must always produce the same effect: And this you will indubitably find, if you but recall them to your remembrance, and ruminate on them attentively.

This therefore, my dear friends, is what we must conclude with. *Be steadfast and immovable*, as St. Paul exhorts you, in the persons of the Corinthians. Never permit the world to occasion you to lose sight of the solemn truths, this day's mystery presents you with. Think of them; meditate on them, and exert yourselves incessantly to promote the work of God; *knowing that your labour is not vain in the Lord.* 1 Cor. xv. 58.

We have taken our resolution, Oh Sovereign Being! We are determined never more to side with the world. Henceforth then, my brethren, may all our desires tend to him. May all that we have or are contribute to manifest the glorious triumph of our Deliverer. And may our whole employment be to *sing the praises* of this august *victim*, whose blood has healed the wound of sin, and procured to the offender the general amnesty of his crimes.

Before *the immolation of this divine sacrifice*, alas! what were we? And without it, what should we still be? Ah! Christians! lost *sheep*, wandering at a distance from the fold, and at the mercy of the ravenous wolf. But, to-day, ranged under the banners of the victorious *lamb*, let us celebrate his triumph. Yes, we were irrecoverably lost, had not *innocence* itself, *Jesus Christ*, our God, interposed in our behalf, and *reconciled us to his Father*.

Let our hearts then be penetrated with the most lively sense of gratitude, at the sight of so many favours. Let the world take up the task of displaying its trifling emptiness. Let it trumpet the magnificence of its honours, the happiness of its wealth, the pungency of its pleasures. For our part, let us publish the glorious laurels, obtained on this day by the victory of *life*.

Transported with delight at the view of such wonders, relate to one another what you have *seen*, what consolations you have experienced. Let your companions know that you have felt comfort at the sight of *Jesus risen and alive*.

Although his resurrection be the foundation of our hope, this will afford us no grounds of joy, unless we be truly risen with him. If our conscience can but yield us this pleasing testimony, conformable

able to our Jesus, we shall arrive at that happy *Galilee*, the road to which he has marked out for us.

Divine Saviour! We believe, and confess in the face of the universe, that thou art *truly risen from the dead*. But shall this unquestionable proof of the resurrection of our bodies be likewise the certain pledge of the salvation of our souls? O King of Kings! who to-day dost *triumph* over all thy adversaries, *have compassion on us*, and work this prodigy in our behalf; that when our bodies be clothed with immortality, we may receive the reward assigned to the resurrection of the just. Amen.

DISCOURSE XV.

On the Ascension of JESUS CHRIST.

Ascending on high, he led captivity captive. Ephes. iv. 8.

BEHOLD your Redeemer, Christians, victorious over sin and hell, re-ascending to his throne of glory. Behold the crowd of captives, that attend him ; who, hitherto confined in the gloomy caverns of the earth, now accompany their Liberator, and swell his festive triumph. But principally remark the hearts of his disciples and the rest of the faithful, disengaged from terrestrial objects and soaring to heaven after him. For this is the chief design of the glorious mystery now proposed to us. To-day, my friends, we change our master. We quit a deceitful world, to whose tyrannical laws we have long been enslaved. We become the subjects of our legitimate Sovereign, whose intention is to make us reign with him. We close our eyes to perceptible objects, where Christ is no longer to be found ; and we open them to things invisible, in the midst of which we adore him. He is not now on earth ; consequently our affections should grovel here no more. He is in heaven, to which our desires should henceforth tend. *Seek the things, that are above, where Christ is sitting.* He is at the right hand of God. *Mind then the things, that are above, not the things, that are on earth.* Coloss iii. 1. Such, brethren, are the lessons, which the solemnity of this joyful festival exhibits ; to disengage our hearts from the earth,

earth, and to raise them up to heaven; the necessity and advantages of which I will here unfold to you, after having recommended ourselves to the clemency and aid of our triumphant Jesus.

The Son of God came into the world not to do his own will, but the will of his heavenly Father. Wherefore he was desirous that every thing regarding him, should be accomplished in the order of succession, prescribed to him from above. At the time prefixed he made his appearance on our globe. He awaited, in a silent obscurity, the term marked for the commencement of his public ministry. He staid for the seasons assigned by his celestial Director for the performance of his miracles. He looked back into his life, to see that every thing that had been wrote concerning him, was completed. He searched among the prophets to find out the precise instant, in which, all being consummated, the victim was to die. In the silence of the tomb, he awaited the hour affixed for his resurrection: and, after his return from the regions of the dead, in a state betwixt heaven and earth, as I may say, he expected the moment of his glorification. Let us adore this perfect obsequiousness to the orders of his Father. Ye mortals! vain in your conceptions, restless in your desires, and impatient under sufferings, who must have every thing begin and end at your own time, learn your duty better, when you see that your Redeemer conforms the whole system of his life to the plan established by the will of heaven.

What we ardently desire is the most frequent topic of our conversation. And, during the few days which Christ was pleased to spend on earth after his resurrection, what else did he talk of but the kingdom of God? He reproves his disciples for bewailing his departure from them, which was to terminate in his complete felicity. *You lament*, he says; *but, if you loved me, you would rejoice, because I am going to the Father.* John xxiv. 28. As if he had said: either you are ignorant of my true interests, or indifferent to them: know you not that my Father is the source of every good, and the centre of all happiness.

The Doctors of the Church unanimously agree, that the glory of Christ's humanity was not perfected but by the mystery of his Ascension. This his glory indeed became visible on mount Thabor, though its duration was but short. It appeared again at his resurrection, but only in secret, and in the obscurity of the sepulchre. At his Ascension, however, it takes a lasting form, and becomes permanent, as well as public.

With what amazement do the Apostles see their divine Preceptor rising in the air, and behold him refulgent with brightness, piercing through the clouds! A sight, dear Christians, amply sufficient to raise up their desires to heaven after him, and fix them unalterably on that abode of bliss. Let the world hold out to them its most brilliant and alluring charms; they contemn and trample on them. The earth becomes foreign and estranged. Heaven alone, to which
their

their Jesus is ascended, can now employ their thoughts; here is the attractive magnet that concentrates all their wishes.

Although I leave you, my dear disciples, says their beloved Master, it is not without regret. How great soever the glory, that is reserved for me above, I could not resolve on quitting you, did not your interest call me thither more strongly than my own.

For no, my friends; Christ does not go to heaven merely to enjoy the glory which is due to him as the Son of God; nor to reap the fruits of his victory in full, as if it was complete. No, I say, he is not a cold spectator of his servants struggles here on earth. He is still solicitous for them; he still suffers, and is persecuted in them, as he tells Saul; he both animates them to the combat, and fights their battles. Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of his Father, as victor in his own regard; and, at the same time, he stands before him in the posture of a mediator, in behalf of us, in whom he has still to conquer.

Let the mystery of this day therefore rouse our confidence, my friends; since it shews us our Redeemer ascending to the completion of his felicity in heaven. And, as he there presents himself in our behalf, let us resume the care of our salvation with redoubled ardour; and, immovable in our hopes, let us work without ceasing; let us run without stopping; assured that our labour will not be useless, nor our race in vain.

What a subject of grief for you, O holy Apostles! exclaims St. Bernard. You have forsaken every thing for your divine Master, and behold, he now forsakes you. He is instructing them, and they are listening; when, on a sudden, they see him rising from the earth. *While they were looking on, say the Acts, he was raised up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.* Acts i. 9.

What think you of this, dear people? Do you approve of the method your Saviour here takes to wean his disciples from the world? Or if you approve of it in their regard, can you dare to murmur at it in your own? Do we imagine that we have less attachment to the world than the Apostles had? Do we flatter ourselves that our affection to it is attended with less danger: or, that God will indulge us with such liberties as he would not suffer in them? Shall we never comprehend how extremely jealous he is of our hearts: or what he has done to acquire the sole dominion of them, and to detach them from every other object? Only reflect on the variety with which our mortal state is chequered. What a mixture of good and evil? The one to make it supportable, the other to disgust us of it. How many subjects of joy, and how many causes of grief? If the outward man be at peace, the inward is in trouble. If we are propped up on the one hand, on the other we are shoved down. Encircled with friends and enemies, with flatterers and defamers, with favourers and spies, what pleases us to-day, to-morrow becomes our aversion.

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Who is there that does not experience this heterogenous mixture of sweet and bitter? You, Parents! find it in the conduct of your children: you, Men of business! in the event of trade: you, Sensualists! in the pursuit of pleasure, and amidst the lures of dissipation. But what would be your sentiments were your pleasures free from disgust, your adventures from risk, your children from bad inclinations? With all this counterpoize of misery the world is dear to you: how much dearer would it be then, were its delights pure and unallayed?

"Woe to the audacious soul," St. Augustine says, "which seeks to make its own ideal happiness, independently of thee, O Lord!" But do we sincerely desire to find that repose which we have spent so much useless time in looking after? Here, subjoins this Saint, is the certain method to obtain it: let your heart be in heaven, and you will have peace on earth; for nothing can rest but on its centre. Now, our centre is heaven; or rather God himself, the bliss of heaven. An earnest desire of heaven therefore, a frequent view of those happy mansions will settle us in a christian independence, and raise us above the transient occurrences of life. Whatever may befall us; whatever be our circumstances, we shall say with the Apostle; *here we have no lasting city, but we seek one to come.* Heb. xiii. 14. *Turn thyself into my rest, my soul,* exclaimed the holy David. Ps. cxiv. Yes, my dear friends, too long have we been the sport of delusive vanity; but let us, henceforth at least, be happy, for which sole purpose we have received our being.

Every event in the life of Christ was deeply impressed with the stamp of the Divinity. But yet all of them together would have been insufficient to fix the faith of his disciples, had he not ascended up to heaven in their presence. The promises he had made them on this head were too solemn and too reiterated not to call for their accomplishment. The least ambiguity in this respect must have defeated his whole plan. For this reason therefore, says St. Paul, *he ascended above the heavens, that he might fulfil all things:* Ephes. iv. 10. i. e. according to the explication of St. Bernard, that he might fill up the measure of the plenitude of our faith.

The Ascension of our Saviour, brethren, is a mystery replete with hope for you; an infallible assurance of your future happiness, if you be not wanting to yourselves. *Christ*, says the Apostle to the Colossians, *is in your hope of glory.* Colos. i. 27. If the Son of God be risen for our justification, as this great teacher asserts positively; so does he ascend to heaven, we may add, to make us sharers in that eternal glory, which is the fruit of his redemption. And never indeed had St. Paul more solid grounds to style him our hope, than when he considered him as throwing open to us the gates of the heavenly Sion, by the completion of this mystery. For here he qualifies himself to fulfil our wishes, and secure our lawful pretensions to the inheritance of his kingdom. *Christ is in you the hope of glory.* If we are susceptible of the feelings of gratitude, what further

further inducement can be wanting to engage us to exert every nerve to follow him, who is at once the motive, the object, and the principle of our expectations?

Every Christian, undoubtedly, would be glad to have a part in the triumphs of his Leader. But the only method to obtain it is to fight and conquer like him. We must follow him with our affections if we would personally reign with him. We must overcome our attachment to the earth; we must get the better of our indifference to heaven, and surmount every obstacle that militates against our duty, and would prevent us from treading in his foot-steps. Now, on the day of Ascension, Christ forakes this earth and all its ties; *I leave the world*, he says. This is the commencement, brethren, of the great work he here completes. Wherefore, to go to heaven after him, we must, in the first place, quit the world, and such affections as glue them to it. And, *I go to the Father*: he enters into his glory, by returning to the celestial mansions. The final step this, the perfection of his triumph, Christians. Let our hearts ascend thither likewise on the wings of desire and love.

If these are our dispositions, friends, Christ will certainly be to us *the hope of glory*. He is our head, gone beforehand to *prepare our places*. He has already conducted thither the first fruits of the human race, who were fighting for freedom in the captivity of Limbo: and his most sincere desire is, that the rest of his mystical members may be introduced to the same happiness. For which intent he has commissioned his Ambassadors to *go and teach all nations* the terms on which their claim to admittance must depend.

Gifted with the treasures of immortality, our Deliverer nevertheless carries up to heaven the scars of the wounds he received on earth; to shew them to his Father, as so many title-deeds, that assert our right to the felicity he is about to enter on. See your Saviour now above therefore, in the double capacity of your Priest and Victim. *We have a great High-Priest*, says St. Paul, *who hath passed into the heavens*. Heb. iv. 14. But what are his qualifications? To be without spot or stain; *holy, innocent, exempt from the defects of sinners*; and, for this reason, *raised higher than the heavens*. Heb. vii. 26. Hither he brings his sacred blood, and renewing the bitter sorrows of his passion, offers it to the Almighty Father in our favour to the end of time.

This of our Victim is the character under which St. John describes him in the Apocalypse. *I saw in the midst of the throne a Lamb standing, as it were slain*. Apoc. v. 6. He is here alive at the right hand of God: and he is here dead also, as we may say, and covered with the wounds with which he expired on the cross. What then, my brethren is there we are not authorized to hope for? If we are poor and needy of ourselves, let us say with St. Paul, *in all things we are made rich in him*. 1 Cor. i. 5. *To him therefore, that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction and honour and glory and power for ever and ever*. Apoc. v. 13.

Scarce was Christ elevated, when two Angels appear, and dismiss the grieved Apostles to the functions of their charge. *Ye men of Galilee! why stand you here looking up to heaven?* Acts i. 11. This same most solid lesson I now address to all. Why stand you here, Christian souls! Souls drawn from the bosom of the Deity himself, and thither destined to return! To-day heaven is opened, and its possession ensured to you. *Why then stand you here?* Every thing inferior to your God is beneath your wishes. His triumph points out to you what you ought incessantly to aspire after. He himself undertakes to guide you, and sets before you his own example. What retards, what hinders you from following him? He calls you not to a precarious and uncertain happiness, nor to a happiness beyond your reach. Assisted by his grace, you may undoubtedly obtain it. You may, I repeat; and yet you do not think of it; or if you think of it, you take no measures to acquire it. *Why stand you here?* Allege not the difficulties that obstruct the road to it, my friends. That there are difficulties I agree with you. But do we live in an age, in which difficulties are attended to? Has not the sea its rocks, and shipwreck its horrors? Nevertheless, are not these objects daily braved for the sake of a trifling interest? Say not that you want assistance. Is not Christ, in your flesh, at the right hand of his heavenly Father? Why, therefore do we not run to him? Why do we not pray to him, and through him? What is there he cannot do for us? And, supported by so powerful a mediator, what may we not effect and accomplish for ourselves? *Why stand you here then?*

Let us remember however, dear people, that if he be a mediator, to plead our cause, he is at the same time our judge, and a judge beyond the reach of either error or corruption. For such as you see him to-day, ascending up to heaven, to take possession of his glory; such likewise shall you behold him at the close of time, descending from heaven to pass sentence on mankind. I know it, will every Christian say, and I live in dread of it. But tell me, brethren; ought we to suffer this apprehension to stifle the desire of going thither after him? Without this desire, Jesus Christ is ascended in vain, in regard to us. Without it, his views on earth are frustrated. It remains then, instead of seeking to palliate our attachment to the world with so many pretences and excuses; it remains, I say, to live in such a manner, that our prospects may keep pace with our religion, which carries us wholly towards *the things above, where Christ is sitting*. Let us live on earth in the service of our Maker and the expectation of Jesus, now reigning in heaven; from whence we look for him, not only to renew this vile and sordid body, but likewise to change our state of misery into the perfection of eternal happiness. Let us attend to the affairs of the world from necessity and charity; while we make the con-

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cerns of heaven the business of our heart. Let us bear the difficulties of life patiently, and submit cheerfully to the summons of death. Let us live, in appearance, on earth with our fellow-members, but in fact, in heaven with the Saints. In fine, let us live in God with Christ; that when he, who is our true life, shall appear in all his majesty, we may be found worthy to be made partakers of his ineffable felicity. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XVI,

W H I T - S U N D A Y.

On the Descent of the HOLY GHOST.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Acts ii. 2.

AFTER the Apostles had witnessed the ascension of their Master into the regions of immortality, they returned to Jerusalem, there to await that *virtue from above*, which they had been taught to expect. *Stay you*, says Christ to them, *in the city, till you be endued with power from on high.* Luke xxiv. 29. Scarcely had ten days elapsed, before they experience the happy accomplishment of his promise. While they were assembled together, offering up their devoutest homages in all the fervour of unanimity, *suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind, and filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were of fire, and sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost empowered them.* Acts ii. 2. &c. Such is the account the sacred penman gives us of this wonderful transaction. But, although the manner of the descent of this God of virtue upon the disciples be most stupendous, the effect it instantaneously almost produces in them, is not less so. The mystery is great, my friends: it is a mystery of plenitude and perfection, of which I will here endeavour, by the divine assistance, to give you an idea. For which purpose, I mean to shew you the twofold triumph

triumph of this Sacred Spirit ; first, over the Apostles themselves, and secondly, over the world, through the operation of their zeal. Divine spirit, fruitful source of every good ! to *direct our feet into the way of peace*, is the peculiar privilege of thy grace. Attend therefore, we now entreat thee, to the supplications of thy servants, and shed on us that heavenly influence, which we here solicit of thee with thy Church.

If it may be allowed us, brethren, in commemorating the present mystery, to compare God with God, the only Son of the eternal Father, with their common spirit the Holy Ghost, we shall find, that although both of them came from heaven to instruct mankind in the same doctrine, yet their success was very different. Under the direction of the former, viz. Jesus Christ, we see the Apostles absorbed in ignorance and stupidity. How many useful lessons does the gospel tell us were laid before them to no purpose ? How many instructions lost upon them, although repeatedly inculcated in the most intelligible terms, and supported by the most striking miracles ? How frequently do the exhortations of their heaven-sent Preceptor end with this remark, that *they understood nothing of them*, that *it was a word bidden from them*, and the like, Luke viii. 34. Inasmuch, that he himself cannot help reproaching them with their dulness and want of discernment ; *are ye also yet*, he says, *without understanding ?* Matt. xv. 16. nor avoid complaining, even after his resurrection, of their backwardness and incredulity ; *O ye foolish and slow of heart !* Luke xxiv. 25.

Feelingly, as we all experience the prevalence of corruption, and the tyranny of our passions ; still, dear people, without the authority of the sacred writings, we never could believe that the Apostles were so weak. Formed by the hand of the Son of God himself ; trained, for a length of time, to the mandates of his doctrine ; and confirmed in its dictates, not only by his words, but yet more by his practice, we never could believe, I repeat, that these Apostles should be so rivetted to the world, as we there perceived them. Tenacious of its maxims, even under the eye of their divine Master, we find them enslaved to such propensities, as one might suppose unknown to their state of life. What a spirit of ambition, of jealousy, of envy, &c. do they not discover on various occasions ! One aspiring to the first place in the kingdom of Christ ; another to the second ; all of them wrangling for precedence. After his resurrection from the dead even, they cannot conceal their ambitious views. They are still impatient to see him found that temporal monarchy, in which their fancy ranges with so unlimited a confidence.

On the other hand, to what extremities are they not hurried by human fears and their apprehensions of the world ? They abandon their Lord and Master ; they abjure him ; they disown all acquaintance with him. At the sole appearance of his enemies, they fly and hide themselves. Their infirm and weakly faith seems to have expired

expired with him on the cross, and to have been buried in his monument. For whatever proofs he gives them of his being risen from the grave, still they doubt, they cavil, they continue incredulous.

Such, my brethren, were the Apostles, according to the testimony of the word of God; nay, according to the portrait, which they have drawn of themselves, when assembled at Jerusalem to receive the promised Comforter. But what tongue shall tell the change, the wonderful, the inconceivable change effected in them by the descent of the Holy Ghost? Ignorant, as we have seen them, behold them now enlightened, more enlightened even than Solomon, in the mysteries of the Most High. Away therefore with dulness. Every thing is at present clear to them. The whole discipline of the Church, its various regulations and numerous ordinances are at once opened to their view. The immense detail of what the Fathers term the deposit of tradition, the economy of the sacred hierarchy, and in short, all the secrets of the kingdom of heaven become known to them in an instant.

Nor is the operation of the celestial Spirit upon their hearts less remarkable. Behold them on a sudden equal to the most heroic undertakings. No longer attached to the world, they quit their nets, and forsake their boats; providence their trust, and poverty their treasure. Generously resolved to relinquish their all for the service of their Master, they determine to attempt and suffer every thing for his cause. Hitherto fear had chilled their blood, and sealed their frozen lips. The zeal and ardour of divine charity now invigorates, and imboldens them to declare the truth publicly. Timid and panic-struck, they had, till this event, been solicitous to conceal themselves from their enemies and the very day-light. But see them now, my friends, bursting from the shackles of confinement, and boldly reproaching these same enemies with the murder of their Deliverer. Unable to smother that sacred fire, which was now kindled in their breasts, behold them moreover bent on dispersing its ardent flames throughout the world. See them separating with this intent, and spreading over the globe; each of them, like the Angel mentioned in the Apocalypse, flying with his gospel through the air, as the Spirit guides him. The wondering earth is roused by the thunder of their voice. The most populous and renowned cities, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, even Rome itself, hear with raptures the eloquence of these illiterate fisher-men. Nor do they know which to admire most; whether the novelty of the doctrine announced, or the irresistible energy, with which it is delivered. The most distant continents, the remotest islands are alike the objects of their zeal. No place is inaccessible to their resolution; no enterprize above their reach; no difficulty above their ardour. Such, dear people, are the consequences

quences of the descent of the Holy Ghost ; such the effects it produces upon the minds of the Apostles.

Let us now take a view of the influence of this divine Spirit on the world at large. Reflect, my friends, on its wretched state, before it was enlightened by the rays of the gospel, and drop a tear to the recollection of its misery. What a general ignorance and corruption pervaded its hapless system ? The most fantastic delusions misguided its belief ; the most shameful manners disgraced its practice. Three thousand years and more had idolatry reared her baleful sceptre ; blasting, without control, cities, provinces and kingdoms, and blighting the native beauties of this sublunary creation. While the true and living God was universally unknown, every knee was bent without reserve to stocks and stones. All, it is true, were not equally ignorant ; but all were equally the dupes of error. The conduct of them, that seemed the best informed, was merely rational ; while the bulk of the people delivered up, as St Paul tells us, to the tyranny of licentiousness, debased themselves below the level of the brutes even. Where then, amidst this deluge of impiety, shall the hallowed ark of the gospel obtain a resting place ? How shall the heavenly plants of christian virtues find room for growth amidst the ravages of iniquity ? To human eyes the thing may seem impossible, perhaps. But, if it does, my brethren, it is only because we do not comprehend the force of that sacred influence, which the Holy Ghost, at his appearance, introduced into the world. He descends upon the disciples, as Christ had promised ; he speaks by them, as by his oracles ; and behold the wonders of his power. The earth puts on a different face. The prince of darkness is expelled from his long usurped dominion ; and the God of heaven is adored *in spirit and truth*. Pure and unsullied sacrifices, even that immaculate one of the body and blood of his beloved Son, are now offered to him throughout the universe. Temperance and modesty succeed to luxury and riot ; meekness and patience take the place of violence and heat ; and every virtue, that can add a lustre to the dignity of human nature, shines out, in all its brightness.

Read the history of the Acts of the Apostles ; that concise, but admirable narrative of the birth and infancy of God's church. There you will see, dear people, the affecting simplicity, with which it describes the behaviour and employments of the first believers. There you will behold prayers, that, for their continuance, may be almost styled perpetual ; austere fasts ; a holy greediness for the word of life ; incessant meditations ; a constant attention to the will of heaven ; a charity so refined, so celestial, that, notwithstanding the difference of ages and conditions, of characters and climates, they all appear actuated by the same spirit, and directed by one single mind. There you will find self-interest, that fruitful source of variance and discord, banished from among them, and, in its stead, the ancient practice of possessing the gifts of providence in common.

common re-established. There you will witness that, in this amiable society, there is no desire, but that of the public welfare; no contest, but that of humility; no pursuit but that of benevolence. There, in fine, you will learn that the innocence of their lives, the purity of their morals, their integrity, their disinterestedness, &c. are matter of astonishment both to the Jews and to the Gentiles: while all are compelled to acknowledge this change to be the work of the Deity; and to confess, to the honour of truth, that God alone can reform depravity, and *renew the face of the earth*.

But here, my friends, I must stop, and reluctantly draw the curtain before the beauties of this lovely scene. Reluctantly, I say, in every sense. For not only am I loath to turn your eyes from the terrestrial paradise, you have been viewing; but still more unwilling to fix them on such an unpleasant prospect, as our degeneracy affords. We, dear people, derive our origin from these primitive and illustrious Christians. But with what face can we call ourselves their children? We may boast of having them for our progenitors: but will not they be ashamed of their descendants, think you? Blessed Apostles! no longer would you know the earth; this earth, I say, heretofore sanctified by your sweet and by your labours. Still indeed, by the grace of heaven, it makes profession of Christianity: but, in spite of its profession, does it not, in practice, bear a strong resemblance to what it was formerly. For to survey its present features. Is not interest the favourite Deity, to which every heart pays adoration? Are not oaths and lewd discourse the disgrace of the best of companies, and the chief support of conversation? Are not the enticing nets of pleasure spread abroad on every side of us, to the destruction of thoughtless youth? Do not such abominations sometimes rise up among us, as the very heathens were unconscious of? Do not levity and dissipation mark the character of the age, and the spirit of amusement stamp an odium on every thing serious? Did sensuality and voluptuousness ever riot with less restraint; bidding defiance to reproach and shame in open day-light? Was ever the tongue of slander and defamation more unbridled; or the voice of infidelity more loud and clamorous than at present? The cross indeed, the emblem of Christ's victory, adorns our places of worship and decorates our altars: but can we say with truth that it influences our practice, that it acts upon our morals, that it reigns in our hearts? I fear there are but few, that can look up to it with such a confidence. To little purpose, brethren, have the idols of paganism been dethroned, if we still continue to pay homage to our passions. To little purpose have the heathenish divinities been exposed, and their emptiness laid open to the examination of the public, if we still render allegiance to the depravity of corrupt nature. Happy days of Christianity! too, too soon expired, will you never more revisit this deserted and disconsolate earth? Shall we never again behold the semblance of that primitive society, which to the end of time will reflect such honour on religion and its founders?

To

To judge therefore by the effects, dear friends ; has this divine Spirit, whose mighty power you have here attested, been hitherto a *Spirit of truth* to us, as he was to the Apostles and their first adherents ? If he has not, to what can it be imputed but to the hardness of our hearts and the corruption of our morals ? How much soever we may profess, as Christians, to be the disciples of this sacred Spirit, has he yet been able to convince us of the veracity of his heavenly doctrine ; to prevail upon us to like it, and to inspire us with a sincere and efficacious will to practise it ? We bow implicitly to his holy documents in speculation ; but do we conform our conduct to them ? We talk of them frequently, and often eloquently ; but does our practice keep pace with our declarations ? We give lessons to others on the matters they inculcate ; but have we ourselves a thorough persuasion of their justness ? Do we believe with a lively faith that, to follow Jesus Christ, we must not only take up our cross, but must also consider it as the object of our glory ? Do we believe without hesitation all the points of morality the gospel teaches ? And can we affirm that we submit to them with as much alacrity in our hearts, as we profess to do with our lips ? Let the picture, I have just drawn, of the present state of things determine it.

The disciples and their followers, on receiving the Holy Ghost, were ready to confirm the faith of heaven with their blood. Are we disposed, I do not say, to die for it, but to sacrifice our inordinate desires to its dictates ? According to this rule, are there grounds to hope that this Spirit of truth has disabused us as to a thousand errors, which, give birth to the disorders, that reign among us ? If this be not the case, is it not evident, beyond a doubt, that the Holy Ghost has not imparted himself to us, as he did to the primitive faithful ?

But, O sacred and all powerful spirit ! vouchsafe at least to-day to take possession of our stubborn hearts. May the influence of thy grace operate more forcibly to their sanctification, than the maxims of deluded mortals to their misguidance and seduction. Instead of those hearts of flint, which the world has formed for us, give us, we entreat thee, hearts of flesh, hearts soft and pliable to the impressions of thy touch. Adorable comforter of our souls ! Inexhaustible source of light ! Spirit of concord and charity ! descend upon thy votaries. Strengthen the weak ; animate the slothful ; encourage the dejected ; solace the afflicted ; comfort the sorrowful ; soften the obdurate, and subdue the rebellious. We do not ask of thee that power of working miracles, which thou wert pleased to communicate to the Apostles. All we solicit, and what we implore most fervently, is that thou wouldst deign to establish in our souls the seat of true piety and virtue. Thus, enriched with the abundance of thy graces in this state of our mortality, we may hope to be crowned with the wreaths of thy glory in the mansions of endless happiness. Amen.

DISCOURSE XVII.

W H I T - M O N D A Y.

On CONFIRMATION.

They received the Holy Ghost. Acts viii. 17.

IN the passage, here alluded to, we are informed, my friends, that the inhabitants of Samaria having submitted to the faith of Christ, St. Peter and St. John were invited to that city to administer confirmation to them. As soon as the Apostles had spread their hands on these new converts, according to the form adopted, *they received the Holy Ghost*, in a perceptible and open manner. *As yet, say the Acts, he had not descended upon any of them, since they had only been baptized.* It is certain however, brethren, that we are also made partakers of his gracious influence at our baptism. How then can it be said that, although these Samaritans had been washed in the sacred laver of regeneration, they had not yet been favoured with the unction of the heavenly Spirit? The sequel of this discourse will unravel the seeming mystery.

You must know, dear people, that the grace of the Holy Ghost is imparted to us for various purposes. Our redeemer, Jesus Christ, is the sole author of all the sacraments. But, in the institution of their different kinds, he had different objects in view; and according to his intentions, the Spirit of God is poured upon us to answer those designs. By the sacrament of baptism we receive the Holy Ghost to the purpose of a second birth; to a spiritual renovation;

to be made children of grace, members of Christ and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. Such are the effects of baptism. By confirmation we receive the effusions of this divine Spirit in a far greater abundance. Here we receive him fully. Here we receive him in all his plenitude. Here we receive him, in short, as the disciples did on the day of his descent, of which we now celebrate the memory. *They were filled with the Holy Ghost*; Acts ii. 4. and so are we by confirmation. At baptism we are regenerated, and born anew to the life of grace. By confirmation we are established in the rights of perfect manhood. Such then is the subject, I mean to entertain you with to-day, my friends; a subject no less fraught with instruction, than suited to the solemnity. And for fear the extent of it should carry me too far, I will endeavour to unite, in as few words as possible, all that regards the dignity and effects of confirmation with the dispositions it requires, and the obligations it brings with it. Spirit of Light! replenish our hearts with the unction of thy grace, and direct us by its aid to comprehend thy sacred mysteries.

Before I attempt to speak upon the effects of confirmation, it will be advisable to explain in what this sacrament consists. Confirmation then, dear Christians, is an institution of divine ordinance, which invests us with a spiritual strength to encounter the enemies of religion, and to confess our faith boldly in the face of every danger. All such as undertake to espouse the part of God and obey the dictates of his gospel, will have to contend with Satan, a most formidable enemy. Formidable, I say, my brethren; and that not only on account of his power, which nothing on earth can be a match for; but likewise on the score of his aversion to mankind, which is so implacable, as to leave nothing unattempted to effect their ruin. Unequal then, as we are, and inadequate to such a task, the goodness of our God supplies us with many means of protection and defence; of which the first and most powerful is the sacrament of confirmation.

Our catechism, my friends, informs us that only a Bishop can administer this sacred rite. First, because the Bishops being the head officers of the Church militant, it is their peculiar province to receive the oaths of those soldiers, that enlist under its banners. And secondly, because the eminence of the episcopal dignity and the fulness of its power reflect the majesty and virtue of Christ risen from the dead. Now, as the Son of God was pleased to send down the Holy Ghost on his disciples, in consequence of his resurrection; so likewise it belongs to the superiors of his church to confer this heavenly Spirit; since, by their station, they are the most complete and finished models of the great Redeemer of the world. And what should inspire you with a still higher degree of gratitude to Christ, and of respect for the episcopal character, is that these said prelates are enabled to give you by this sacrament, whatever the Holy Ghost, although deputed by Christ himself, imparted to the first believers.

Hence

Hence you may infer how great a reverence you ought to bear to this primitive institution.

Yes, dear people, it is our duty to cherish a most particular esteem for this grace-diffusive ceremony: and, not to remind you that, to neglect to receive it wilfully, would be to incur the guilt of a grievous sin, it ought to be our joy to have it in our reach: first, because being left by baptism in the weakly state of christian infancy, its strengthening aid is requisite to complete our spiritual life; and secondly, because the effect, which is peculiar and proper to it, is to confer the plenitude of grace; as the immediate end of baptism is to unfold the gates of heaven to us. *Stay in the city*, says Christ to his disciples, *till you be endued with power from on high*; Luke xxiv. 49. i. e. as the fathers testify, till you be established in perfection.

Confirmation, brethren, is that holy unction, which God promises by his Prophet: *I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh*. Joel ii. 28. Who is it, says St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, Who is it that *confirms* and *strengthens us in Christ*? It is God himself, he replies, who, by *anointing us*, *seals our souls*, and *gives us the pledge of his Spirit in our hearts*. 2 Cor. i. 21. On this account, confirmation is sometimes called the *sacred*, and at other times the *blessed* unction; because it supports us in our faith, and superadds strength to the grace of baptism. By confirmation we are saturated, if I may be allowed so to speak, with the effusions of the Holy Ghost. By confirmation we solemnly ratify the engagements, made at our baptism, to renounce the devil with all his pomps and works of sin. In fine, by confirmation we are stamped with the heavenly seal of the Divinity, through the imposition of the episcopal hands: an imposition, which is coeval with the times of the Apostles; who, as we find on various occasions, made use of it in communicating the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But, to inspire you with a yet higher degree of respect for this venerable rite, I will here lay before you a short detail of its effects, and the advantages that accompany it.

The first effect then, my dear friends, and the chief advantage resulting from the participation of this sacrament, is the support of our infirmity. Washed in the baptismal font, we are immediately clothed with the robes of innocence and sanctity. But still we are left in a state of feebleness in regard to the allurements of vice. The oil of confirmation however invigorates our infant-system, and communicates the strength of heaven to the weakness of human nature; a strength, my brethren, which is no less requisite to keep us steady to our faith amidst its numerous opponents, than to preserve us from being born away by the torrent of the habits, the persuasions and the censures of mankind. How deplorable indeed is the weakness of the generality of our modern Christians, when called upon to do their duty in the service of virtue! While some of them, without a scruple, unreservedly join in with the maxims of the world; others,

shuddering

shuddering at the difficulty of making head against temptations, indulge their senses freely in all they crave. And would you know the cause of such a pusillanimous and guilty conduct? It is their culpable neglect, or their unworthy participation at least, of this august and holy sacrament. Previously to their confirmation, the Apostles were timidity itself: but, fortified with this support, they bid defiance to fear and terror.

A second effect of this operative ceremony is to impress upon us a character, or spiritual mark, which is infinitely more glorious, than whatever distinctions can be conferred by the powers of the earth: a character, that reflects an additional lustre on every grace produced by baptism.

Another effect of confirmation is to efface all venial faults, and even such mortal sins, as may have continued undiscovered after the search of a diligent examination.

In fine, Christians, the principal effect of this sacrament, as I have repeatedly insinuated, is to endue us with a supernatural strength; a strength, which, issuing from the Deity, enables us to resist all the enemies of our salvation, and to confess his faith courageously, although at the expense of our very lives. From these four effects, or to speak perhaps more properly, these four advantages of confirmation, let us draw this conclusion; viz. that, if we are weak of ourselves, we shall find our relief in this salutary support; and that, if nature be corrupt and inclinable to evil, the grace of this preservative will afford us a sure remedy. Let us next consider briefly the dispositions this sacrament requires of us, and the obligations it lays us under.

From what has been intimated, dear people, I flatter myself that you would be ardently desirous to receive it, had you not already been so happy. But in this regard, you know, baptism and confirmation are alike. As the character, which each of these sacraments impresses, is indelible; so an attempt to repeat either of them would be criminal and sacrilegious. However, from your conviction, I do not doubt but you will shew yourselves solicitous that neither your children nor your servants shall lose the benefits annexed to it. The opportunities of receiving it occur but seldom: a motive, that should prompt you to embrace them gladly, when they offer, and to learn the dispositions, which its consequence demands. And what are these dispositions? Not to be prolix, I will class them under the two general heads of internal and external. The former relate to the soul, the latter to the body.

The first disposition requisite in approaching to this sacrament is sanctifying grace. By which I mean that our souls must be pure and undefiled with any sin, which we term mortal or deadly: and this disposition, according to the principles we are taught, is only to be acquired by a sincere and good confession. I say nothing of communion; because many are admitted to the rites of confirmation, before they are initiated in the awful mystery of the eucharist. And the

the disposition, I here mention, brethren, is the more indispensable, as the Spirit of God will not enter into a soul tainted with this guilt.

The second thing advisable in the line we are speaking of, is either to fast, or relieve the needy, if in our power, or to offer up some other work of charity for this intention. To which I add that it is likewise proper to be instructed in the leading articles of religion. So far for the interior dispositions of the soul; and as to those, that regard the body, I will mark them out in short. The first of them is to come fasting, if it can be done without an inconvenience. The second, to clean your faces, especially about the forehead, where the unction is to be applied. The third, to be provided with a God-father or sponsor. The fourth, to be clothed decently and with the modesty becoming a Christian. The fifth and last, to be upon your knees, soliciting God confidently to replenish you with his heavenly gifts.

And now, my friends, do you desire to be informed whether or no, at your confirmation, you were made partakers of the fruits, which this sacrament produces. I will here lay before you some unquestionable proofs, by which you may form your judgment. If you receive with joy all the afflictions, crosses and misfortunes, that you meet with: if you are willing to forfeit every thing, even life itself, should it be necessary, rather than deny your faith: if, unbiassed by human respects, you are far more apprehensive of displeasing God, than offending men: in fine, if you are attached both in heart and mind to Jesus Christ, to his gospel, to his doctrine, and every day labour to advance in the way of charity and righteousness.

But perhaps, brethren, you may wish to see some examples of such persons, as we allow were duly prepared for the reception of the Holy Spirit. By these you may perceive that the measure of the graces, which he imparts at confirmation, are proportioned to the dispositions, with which he is welcomed by the receiver. Of this we have the most convincing evidence in the case of the Apostles. For why does the Spirit of God communicate himself to them with so much profusion and liberality? Because, following the advice of their beloved Preceptor, they separated themselves from the conversation of the world, and devoted their hours to prayer: because, absorbed in contemplation, they ardently and unanimously longed for the descent of the divine Spirit: and because, in consequence of their longings, their hearts were purified and prepared to entertain him. This, I hope, may suffice to make you sensible that you cannot be too careful in regard to your children and your servants; nor too solicitous, on their approaching to this sacrament, to instil into them such sentiments, as may be as similar as possible to those of the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost. It remains only to see the obligations, we contract, by partaking of this heavenly unction.

And

And these obligations, I reduce in short to two; on each of which I mean to say but little, as they are hinted at already. The first obligation then, which we engage ourselves to, on receiving this sacrament, is to declare resolutely for Jesus Christ. And this is the advice, Tertullian gives us, when he says that a Christian, so far from blushing to live up to the rigid maxims of the gospel, ought to consider it as his greatest honour so to do. No, dear brethren, no; you are not to be ashamed of your religion, nor its principles; on the contrary, a diligent and exact compliance with the observances, they enjoin, would not only please the Deity, but redound to your own credit also. Do your utmost therefore to fulfil them, as you are taught, on all occurrences. Fulfil them in the house of God, by deporting yourselves with all possible attention in his presence. Fulfil them in your families, by a regularity of conduct, and by reading prayers in common. Fulfil them in private, by pious lectures and meditations. Fulfil them in public, by a strict adherence to the divine law and the precepts of the Church. Fulfil them, in short, in every place, by openly espousing the cause of Christ; and, whenever you see it trampled on by sinners, by reprov- ing them, as far as your authority may go, with that charitable zeal, which virtue recommends. For unless you do so, if your station requires it of you, you may justly apprehend lest the curse, pronounced on sin, should recoil on your own heads. *Whoever, says our Saviour, shall be ashamed of me, i. e. of following my documents and pursuing my interests, him will the Son of Man be ashamed of, when he shall come in glory.* Luke ix. 26.

The second obligation, this holy unction lays upon us, is to direct our views to heaven, and to aspire to the practice of the most eminent and perfect virtue. For the effect of confirmation, as I must once more repeat, is to strengthen us against our enemies, and to establish us in grace; to encourage us to fast, to give alms, to mortify our sensual appetites; in a word, to incite us to the performance of every thing laudable and virtuous; to enable us to discharge properly the duties of our state of life, and to make us good children and good parents, good servants and good masters, good husbands and good subjects. Let us now my friends, renew these pious resolutions, and determine to comply in future with the obligations, we then submitted to.

O God! prostrate in thy presence, we beseech thee to overlook our want of preparation, when we received thy sacred gift. We now protest before thee that henceforth we will strive to live like faithful Christians, and endeavour to fulfil the engagements, by which we bound ourselves at confirmation. Every place shall testify that we behave like soldiers of Jesus Christ; like such, as have been favoured with the plenitude of thy holy Spirit. Grant us, O Lord, the grace to condemn the false opinions of the world, and to renounce its maxims, its tenets, and its works. *Father of mercies, and God of all consolation!* support our weakness, and give us strength to resist

the many enemies, that surround us. Make our faces as hard as brags, against the delusions of fear and shame, and render our hearts impenetrable to the impressions of guile and flattery. Teach us to suffer, like the Apostles after Pentecost, with resignation, with patience and with joy. In fine, may we never more look for our peace and satisfaction in the commerce of the world, but solely in an union with thee, in the observance of thy commands, and in whatever may contribute to aggrandize thy glory.

And thou, *O divine Spirit!* who didst descend upon the disciples, descend upon us likewise. *Come*, and dispense thy gifts among *thy faithful*: *come and kindle in them the fire of thy charity.* *Spirit of wisdom!* teach us to know our enemies, and to seek, by flying from the world, an asylum against its depravity, and a support against its influence. *Spirit of the fear of the Lord!* dispel that servile timidity, which frights us from our duty: *come*, and fill our breasts with a wholesome fear of the living God. Alas! if thou dost deign to visit thy servants only, what pretensions can we have to thy favours? Hearts, that the world and passion have corrupted, cannot but be most unsuited to thy sanctity and holiness. *Come* nevertheless, and take possession of them. Extinguish those profane flames, that have so long laid them waste; and light up in them the hallowed fire of charity and love. *Spirit of holiness!* in fine, *come*, and sanctify our souls, which should live to thee alone on earth, that they may merit to live with thee eternally in heaven. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XVIII.

CORPUS CHRISTI.

On the Presence of JESUS CHRIST in the Eucharist.

Is it credible that God should dwell with men on earth!

Paralip. vi. 18.

HAVING finished the superb building of the temple of Jerusalem, the next step, Solomon takes towards the completion of his work, is to introduce and settle in it the ark of the alliance. For this purpose, he issues out his orders to convene the whole nation of the Israelites. At his command, the Ancients of the people, the Chiefs of the families, the Priests and the Levites assemble about their Sovereign. Never was there a day of more solemnity and awful grandeur. The King, at their head, leads the procession of his subjects; who, divided by their tribes and accompanied with the sacred ministers, respectfully swell the train. The ark is born in triumph by the hands of the Priests; while the streets, as they pass along, are deluged with the blood of victims. The august deposit is placed under the wings of the Cherubims, and the temple resounds with canticles of joy. At that instant, the Almighty manifests his glory; the vast edifice is filled with a thick and rolling cloud; and Solomon, in raptures of astonishment, exclaims, *is it credible that God should dwell with men on earth!* But what, after all, does this favourite of heaven see? Nothing but the shadow, Christians, of that, whose substance we possess. For who is it that

resides here with us ? It is thou, O God ! thyself, thy true essence, thy infinite majesty, which the heavens cannot circumscribe. And is it possible we should be so highly honoured ? Truly *the Lord hath done great things for us*. Ps. cxxv.

And yet, my brethren, sorry am I to say that, on this occasion, it must be still the preacher's lot to blame and censure. Oh faith ! whither art thou fled ? A God dwells in the midst of us : what a prodigy of love on his side ! And we are scarcely mindful of him : what a prodigy of ingratitude on ours ! But let me here endeavour to rouse you from your stupor ; and to second my design, dear people, turn over in your minds, in the whole extent of your faith, the residence of Jesus Christ upon our altars, and you will undoubtedly exclaim with wonder, *is it credible ?* On the other hand, consider the general conduct of believers, in respect to this same residence, and again you will cry out, *is it credible that God should dwell among us*, and we be so regardless of him ? This twofold prodigy I mean to make the subject of the present discourse, after a petition to our divine Saviour, whose liberality is so unbounded.

The real presence of our God, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Almighty Father in the Eucharist, is a matter, no doubt, my friends, that exceeds our comprehension. More docile however than those, who contest the truth of it on whatever grounds, we subject our reason to our faith, and believe what we cannot fathom. Let our senses affirm the contrary ; still of this we are assured that so far from being infallible, they are at best but erring guides. And, if this be the case, as experience proves it is, in the most ordinary occurrences ; with how much more justice may we presume it so to be in the supernatural and extraordinary interpositions of the divine power ? On the other hand, let reason present her difficulties, the operations of heaven, we know, are above her reach ; and the clearest of her dictates is that she ought to submit her dubious glimmer to the lustre of that sun of truth, the Deity himself. Wherefore, since the infallibility of his word has said, *this is my body*, we rest satisfied in relation to this unfathomable subject : a subject, which, however unintelligible to our senses, no arguments can evince to be absurd or inconsistent.

In this residence of Christ among us, brethren, the whole is one continued mystery of love. Our Redeemer, at that last and ever memorable supper, previous to his quitting the world, being desirous to make good his promises, and bequeath to his disciples, and through them to all mankind, a legacy worthy of himself, takes the bread and wine before him ; and distributing them, he says, *take and eat ; this is my body : this is my blood*. Matt. xxvi. What an unparalleled transaction ! *Do ye this for a commemoration of me* ; Luke xxii. 19. thereby giving to them, and, in them, to their successors a power, enabling them, like himself, to change bread into his body and wine into his blood. *This*, says St. Paul, *I have received from the Lord, which I have also delivered to you*. 1 Cor. xi. 23. Yes, Christians ;

Christians ; from this altar I speak to you with a confidence equal to that of this teacher of the Gentiles ; and I tell you, we likewise have learnt from God, that the bread we here divide, is not common bread ; but that it calls for your discernment, because it is, in fact, the body of your Saviour. Before he left the world, (for as St. John says, having always loved his own, so he loved them to the last) he anticipated what they were about to suffer from the loss of him : he consoles them by the most assured demonstrations of his charity, and makes over to them by his will, that sacred and divine flesh, which he had so often promised them for their comfort.

Neither does he stop here. Not content with bestowing this inestimable gift on those that were present, he contrives moreover, by delegating his power, to perpetuate it to the end of time. Without dividing his person, he multiplies his existence : without forsaking the earth, he ascends to heaven : without deserting his spouse, he returns to his Father.

Happy Christians, how enviable your privileges ! Oh Jacob, how lovely thy tabernacles ! Truly, there is not a nation so distinguished as yourselves ; no other people so much favoured as to have its God so near it.

Had it pleased our great Deliverer to have assigned one, and one only temple on this globe of ours for his abode, we should still have been most fortunate. The main grievance of the Jews, at their dispersion among the uncircumcised, was the distance they were removed from Jerusalem, their seat of worship. In those days the Divinity communicated himself to man but reservedly and seldom. For the earth being then contaminated, he limited his public service to one nation, to one city, and to one temple. No sooner is it purified, however, with the blood of his beloved Son, than all restrictions are done away, and the whole universe is sanctified by the presence of Jesus Christ.

When the children of Israel first entered the land of Canaan, they divided themselves into tribes. In like manner, when the Church took possession of the heathen premises, she separated her adherents into distinct and different branches, as it were : and our true paschal Lamb, of which that of the Jews was the type, is the common bond of unity to these numerous divisions ; incorporating into one body all the members of the Catholic faith, however distributed they may be. The field of God's inheritance is spacious : the assemblies, in which we meet to worship him, are many. But what, my dear people, do we find in such places of devotion, as by distinction we term our own ? Nothing more nor less than in others of a like persuasion ; the same victim, the same offerer, the same sacrifice, the same priesthood. Jesus Christ is there ; he is also here ; in the country, as in the town ; in the desert, as in the most populous cities. In short, whichever way we look, we shall indubitably find him : and what is more, we shall at all times find him

him the same ; that is to say, always under a form the most attractive to win our hearts ; always a God, desirous to impart and bestow himself upon us.

The people of Israel, on seeing the manna come down from the clouds, cried out in amazement, *what is this ?* Exod. xv. 16. And why do not you, my friends, when you assist at our sacred mysteries, in which the true manna descends from heaven, and that so frequently ; why do not you, I say, exclaim in a like astonishment, *what is this ?* To consult your senses, it is nothing more than bread. But remove the veil, and behold the majesty that stands confessed : for thus has it pleased the Almighty Being to conceal himself. When he lived among us as our brother, he appeared like one of us : when he made himself our victim, he became vested with our sorrows : when he meant to animate our hopes, he displayed his glory. But now, when he wishes to communicate himself and all his treasures to us, he assumes the form of bread : and, under this novel guise, we possess a God, who is both our father and our brother, our support and our guardian, our solace and our food. Let not the pious soul therefore envy the happiness of those, who, being coeval with Jesus Christ, enjoyed the advantages of living with him. A due attention to the blessings we ourselves are in possession of, must convince us we have neither grounds nor motive to repine.

At the palace-gates of this our Sovereign, there are no watchful guards to keep off the needy crowd ; no obstruction to prevent the entrance of the distressed and humble suppliant. The access to his throne of grace is ever obvious and free. Sinners ! you may here implore the clemency of your judge, and he will listen to you : you may shew him your ulcered wounds, and he will pour the balm of pity into them : you may drop the tear of compunction, and he will mix it with his sacrifice. *Is it credible*, we may say with reason.

But, Oh the perverseness of human nature ! For what else can it be ascribed to, brethren, that our actions so much belie the professions of our tongue, in regard to this grand mystery ? Might I not ask you with much more justice than his enemies did David, *where is thy God ?* This question they put to him by way of insult and reproach : and I now put it to you, my friends, to excite in you, if possible, a proper sense of your misconduct. *Where then is thy God ?* Where is that supreme Lord, whom we profess to adore and worship ? Is he in this chapel ? Or does it seem so by our deportment ? Do you want another mysterious cloud, filling, as heretofore, the house of the Deity, to make you sensible of his presence, and teach you to respect it ? Is not faith sufficient for this ? Or, at least, ought it not to be so ? Are we not Christians ; and, as such, infinitely more honoured than the Jews in the temple of Solomon ? *Where is thy God ?* Are we not blind to his twofold presence in this his chosen habitation : the general presence, I mean, of his immensity,

sity, by which he fills all space, and the particular presence of his body in the holy sacrament of the eucharist? The heavens bow with tremor at the orders of his voice; and we see with indifference the wonders of his bounty. *Where is thy God?* Is he here in this sanctuary? But, while the Angels here minister to him with the most respectful obsequiousness, with what a front of bold assurance does proud man appear in it? Finally, *where is thy God?* Is he in this tabernacle? Or do you undoubtedly believe it, brethren? Do you believe, I say, that his eye pierces through the mystic darkness that envelops him into the recesses of your mind, there to become a witness to the dissipation of your thoughts; into the secrets of your heart, there to attest the impurity of your sensual affections.

In this respect, dear people, what a contrast is our behaviour to that of the first Christians? To have assisted, although but once, at the great sacrifice of the altar, was enough to inspire them with an awful gratitude for a length of time. But how different are things now, alas! And, in fact, what do we modern Christians retain of the piety of our primitive ancestors, but a weak and tottering faith? Or, in relation to the holy eucharist, is it deserving even of this name? A faith, mixed with so much irreverence, and so blended with levity, can this be called a faith? Is a faith, which confirms the hardness of the infidel, and draws upon us the keen, but just reproaches of the unbeliever; is this, I say, the faith that is to glorify God, and bring salvation to ourselves? Ah! my friends, let us ever bewail the insults our Redeemer is here exposed to through the weakness of our faith.

Unquestionably you believe that your Saviour, Jesus Christ is really present in the excharist, and this his sacred person resides upon our altars in disguise. Such is your faith as Catholics: in defence of which, if necessary, you should be willing to give your lives. But, if this be true, ought we not to venerate and respect his habitation? The royal Psalmist tells us there was but one abode in the world that he delighted and took pleasure in. And what should that be but the tabernacle of the alliance; after which his soul panted, as the stag for the living waters? The ark, the mere type and representation of what we possess, transported him with rapture. What then would have been his sentiments, had he actually enjoyed the happiness we are blessed with? Here, would he have said, is my God, whom I hope hereafter to see unveiled in all his glory: here is my Lord, near at hand to relieve me in my necessities and wants: here is my King, to whom I will gladly make a tender of my allegiance: here is my Judge, whose future sentence I stand in awe of. *Lord, God of hosts, how lovely are thy tabernacles!* Ps. lxxxiii. 1. At the sight of thy infinite beauty, my spirits droop with languor: *my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.* In thy adorable presence, I cannot conceal my transports, nor moderate the effusions of my joyful and ravished heart: *my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. Blessed are they who*
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dwell in the house of the Lord! Continually employed in serving thee during time, they may hope at length to adore and bless thee for eternity: *they shall praise thee for ever and ever.* Are these your sentiments, dear brethren? I do not ask if yours be as warm and glowing as those of David, but only if you harbour the like in any degree whatever?

Yes, you reply, we are all fully sensible of the goodness of Jesus Christ, displayed in this grand mystery; and we make it our daily business to return him thanks for it. But where then are the proofs of the acknowledgments you boast of? Does your demeanor, when in his presence, shew what you here say to be the language of your hearts? Take but a view of the palaces of the great: see the attention, the respect, the homage paid to them, and blush at your deportment in regard to the Deity.

In vain are these words of our divine Benefactor, *this is my body*, &c. held up to public view: in vain are the oracles of his Church so often brought forth to prove his real presence, if we subvert by our conduct what his Spouse establishes by her doctrine. By the levity of our carriage, by our inattention and disrespect in relation to this holy sacrament, we give a handle to the incredulous to blaspheme the name of God. *Where is thy God?* is what they say in substance, even now a-days, too frequently. And, in fact, can it be expected that others should acknowledge, if we disavow him? that they should respect, if we condemn him? that they should honour, if we insult him? Words are to no purpose, if our practice contradicts them. Declarations are fugitive, and liable to be puffed away with every breath of wind: while actions are permanent, and may bid defiance to the roughest storms. These then are the proofs, whereby to convince our unbelieving brethren. Without example, the rest is useless.

Ye sons of men! how long will you love vanity and seek after lies? Pf. 4. Henceforth, with a pious eagerness, press forward to the throne of this amiable lamb of God. With a respectful familiarity, pour forth your sorrows into his compassionate heart. No more spend your tears on an unfeeling and callous world; but shed them at his feet, who would still bewail your calamities, did his condition permit it. Hasten to these tabernacles devoted to his reception, and you will have the consolation to experience his benignity: here meet him: here discourse with him heart to heart. He is an attentive friend, who prevents your wants, and spares nothing to gain your confidence: an impartial friend, who makes no distinction between the monarch and the cottager: a zealous friend, who leaves no stone unturned to promote your true interest: a steady friend, who conducts you safely through the vicissitudes of life, and holds out his propitious hand to you in the article of death: a generous friend, who, laden with graces and benedictions, offers them all to your acceptance, and even honours you with the gift of his own sacred person. He is your king and your father: your protector and
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your hope ; your physician and your pastor. Let all mankind ever bless and serve him then. Let them surround his throne, and fill his sanctuary.

Come to him ye just, who know by experience the happiness of his service. At the sight of an object, which the very Seraphims might take fire at, may the flames of his love consume your earthly ties. To dissipate the chill of your tepidity and languor, bask in the warmth of his invigorating beams ; and learn, at the feet of this heavenly Preceptor, that science of virtue, which alone can bring you to the full enjoyment of his vision.

Come to him, ye sinners also, who feel yourselves oppressed with the heavy burthen of your crimes. The throne of this spotless lamb is the only asylum that can afford you any shelter. Lay then your iniquities at the foot of his mercy-seat, and quench your parching thirst with the waters of his grace. To regain your lost innocence, mingle your tears with these health-giving streams, and offer to the eternal Father this propitiatory victim. Then will you see his severity disarmed, and the thunders of his vengeance drop harmless from his hand.

The natural consequence, says St. Chrysostom, of our belief of the real presence, should be to banish sin from among us, to spread every where an air of piety, and to turn the world into a temple, where all the faithful would be votaries. Let us here call to mind the behaviour of the Israelites ; and may their example operate to shame us. While they inhabited the desert, the pavilion of the Lord was in the centre of their encampment, and all the other tents were made to face his awful residence. He would be witness to every thing that passed among his people ; and the people were obliged to look at him in all their motions. From this his tabernacle the orders of their route were issued. Did the cloud make any movement ? the Israelites marched according to their divisions. Did it stop ? they halted. This, in their regard, was a figure ; but, in ours, such an instruction, as can need no further comment. Here is the mansion of the Deity ; his true and real tabernacle, in which he dwells with us in person. You believe it ; and yet you are unmindful of a God who is so closely connected with you. You believe it, and still you neglect, and do not fear to insult him even.

Let us then conclude with admiration, at the twofold prodigy I have here described ; the infinite love, I mean of Christ, so conspicuous in this great mystery ; and our extreme insensibility and want of gratitude in its regard. No longer, my friends, complain of being traduced and falsely accused ; since your own misconduct chiefly gives birth to such reproaches. They that dissent from us on this head, err through ignorance and prepossession. But as for ourselves, our demeanor too frequently belies our words, and affords them a just occasion to say of us, as they do : surely the Catholics do not think as they speak : for our part, we cannot be persuaded the Son of God dwells among us ; while they make this article a ruling tenet
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of their faith : but does their conduct and behaviour keep pace with their professions ?

For ever blessed be the goodness of our liberal Benefactor, who, in the dispensations of his mercy, has given us him for our present comfort, who hereafter will constitute our supreme felicity. O you, my dear people, with whom his providence has lodged the faith of your progenitors, let it be your part to do honour to it by an irreproachable deportment. May your carriage be ever such as your principles demand ; and may the sanctity of your lives entirely correspond with the holiness of your belief. Thus you will support the credit of religion : and he who was the object of your worship in time, will himself be your reward in an eternity of happiness. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XIX.
CORPUS CHRISTI.

On the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

A certain man made a great supper. Luke xiv. 16.

THIS sumptuous feast, to which the householder's friends were so kindly invited, according to the conception of the holy Fathers, was a representation and figure of the divine banquet of the eucharist. But, besides the one here mentioned, the scripture takes notice of another banquet also. *Wisdom*, it says, *hath built herself a house; she hath set forth her table; she hath mingled her wine.* Prov. ix. 1. And what does the Holy Ghost insinuate by this, my friends? The explication is natural. By *wisdom* is meant the word incarnate, the second person of the adorable Trinity: the magnificent *house* she has erected, is the temple of the Deity: the delicious wine she entertains us with, is the blood of Jesus Christ; which, together with his body, is daily offered in the holy sacrifice: a sacrifice that is often profaned, because its dignity is not sufficiently understood; and no less often neglected, because its value is not sufficiently conceived. To obviate which, and to give you a just idea of the importance of this grand sacrifice, I design to make it the subject of the following discourse: and I say, that there is nothing in regard to God, superior to the sacrifice of the Mass; nothing in regard to man, more advantageous and profitable. Two propositions, brethren, which I hope to make you comprehend; after having entreated the guidance of the heavenly Spirit.

Sacrifice,

Sacrifice, dear Christians, is an homage so peculiarly due to the august majesty of God, and so manifestly the prerogative of his sovereign dominion, that, from the infancy of the world, mankind has ever offered it in some form or other. Cain and Abel presented it in the oblation of their first fruits. Noe, and the other Patriarchs posterior to the deluge, raised altars in public to the honour of the Deity. The children of Israel, distinguished from the rest of the human race by an evident predilection, immolated goats and bulls to the living God of their Fathers. And Christianity, having done away all such figures and types, ought likewise to have its sacrifice to fulfil its obligations. Now this, I say, it has in the unbloody victim of the altar, whose excellence and dignity I here mean to shew you. For which purpose, let me observe that, since we are both men and Christians, we owe to God a twofold homage, in consequence of our twofold character. As men; we are bound to honour him in the quality of our Creator; and as Christians, to make him a return proportioned to our obligations on the score of his holy law. And this double duty, so incumbent on us, nothing can discharge but the sacrifice of the eucharist.

For, dear people, whatever man might offer, whether of fruits or of animals; previously to the institution of this grand and solemn sacrifice, nothing of the kind could possibly be adequate to the majesty of the Supreme Being. For this it was requisite that the victim, presented to him, should not only be unspotted, and such as could bear the inspection of this God of infinite holiness; but likewise that it should be all-powerful, and such as could fully answer the demands of his sovereignty. All which is accomplished by the sacrifice of our altars.

In fact, it is an article of our belief, which it imports you to be acquainted with, that the sacrifice of the Mass is a standing repetition, or rather a continuance of the sacrifice of the cross. No, my friends; it is not a simple commemoration, or an empty ceremony, calculated to remind us of the sacrifice of mount Calvary: it is the same action, which we repeat, as often as we celebrate. Hence the ancient Doctors assert that the sacrifice, we offer, is the renewal of Christ's passion. So that, if it be certain (as no one can doubt, who is instructed in his religion) that our Redeemer, on the cross, offered an homage of infinite value to the omnipotence of his Father, it follows of course that we likewise offer to him an homage of equal worth; since the sacrifice, we present him with, is in reality the same as that offered by his Son.

For observe, Christians; it is the immolation of the victim that constitutes a sacrifice. Now, in the sacrifice of the Mass, as in that of the cross, the same victim is immolated, although in a different manner. The same Lord, the same God, as offered himself on mount Calvary, makes daily the same oblation, wherever Mass is said. Whence, of consequence, it results that we
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render to the Almighty the same homage in the mass, as he received at the crucifixion.

I go yet further, and dare to affirm that the glory, we give to God by the sacrifice of the eucharist, seems in some measure to surpass the honour paid him on mount Calvary. The bloody victim, there immolated, was confined to one spot: the rest of the world still bowed to the fictions of idolatry. But, by the unbloody sacrifice of the altar, a grateful victim is offered in every corner of the earth, as the Prophets had foretold. What more shall I add, brethren? If the sacrifice of the cross, on the part of our Deliverer, was an oblation acceptable and pleasing to the Lord; on the part of the Jews, it was an execrable Deicide, that could not but incense him. Whereas, in the sacrifice of the Mass, there is not a single circumstance that does not do him honour. What the Jews did through hatred and the impulse of passion, we do in testimony of his sovereign dominion. Far from using violence, we act in his name; while the sole instrument, we employ in the immolation of this sacred victim, is the authority of his own word. In fine, on mount Calvary, Christ offered himself alone: but, on our altars, he makes his sacrifice in union with his Church, who respectfully joins her endeavours to those of her heavenly Spouse.

Hence what a lesson; in the first place, for us, who have the honour of sacrificing the body and blood of Christ! Let us tremble with dread, if in presenting to God this victim of praise, we unhappily be not worthy to present ourselves with it. And do you also tremble, if, in assisting at Mass, your hearts be not ready to give up all for your Saviour. But, by this sacred oblation, we not only render to God what is his due, as our Lord; but we likewise repay his many claims, as our Benefactor: a second demonstration of the excellence of this sacrifice.

To what a wonderful excess has God carried his love for us! So far, dear people, as to make over to us the only thing worth his keeping. This the gospel tells us plainly, when it says that, *he hath so loved the world, as to bestow his Son upon it.* John iii. 16. But how, I ask, can we make him a due acknowledgment for such a favour? Alas! says the prophet, although we should offer the fatted victim, the prime of animals; although we should sacrifice our wealth, our whole being; besides that these things already belong to him and are derived from his liberality, what are they in comparison with the present made to us? Now, what we cannot do of ourselves, we may, I say, by means of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Yes, by this we are enabled, Christians, to make him a full return. If we have received a God by the incarnation, so do we repay a God by the Mass. What a degree of hope and confidence ought this reflection to inspire us with? Yes, O Lord, when I offer thee Jesus Christ thy coeternal and equal Son: when I sacrifice this innocent victim, which puts itself into my
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hands for the sole purpose of being presented to thee, I repay the full price of thy favours, and make thee an adequate acknowledgment.

But what should be our dispositions in offering this holy sacrifice? Similar to those of Christ, I reply, in his oblation on mount Calvary. There our divine Saviour offered himself through love; and the like principle should animate us in presenting this sacred victim: or else, far from being an honour to us and the foundation of our glory, it becomes our reproach and shame, from the contrariety of our affections.

In fact, my friends, what can there be more disgraceful to one, who believes in Jesus Christ, than to dare to give the lie to the solemn action of his sacrifice? And is not this what you do, when you assist at it without attention? Is this to make to a God, who offers himself through love, that return of love you owe him on such just and numerous titles? And where indeed shall we find this love? Shall it be in the breast of those, who, so far from taking a part in the mysteries set before them, are lost in the impertinent roving of a distracted imagination? Shall it be in the breast of those, who, not satisfied with being dissipated and inattentive themselves, discompose the minds of others by their unbecoming demeanour? In fine, I say, shall it be in the breast of those, who so far from coming to Mass to sue for the pardon of their crimes, only seek to insult the Deity; and murder their fellow-creatures at the very time the Son of God is meditating their salvation? If there can be a just occasion for expressing a holy zeal, is it not at the sight of such an enormous and crying sacrilege? But not to wander from my subject, I will, in the next place, try to shew you that there is nothing, in regard to man, more advantageous than this awful sacrifice.

Remember what has been said, dear people; viz. that the sacrifice of the new law having superseded those of the old, it ought to possess their various properties in an eminent degree. Among the latter, there were some of thanksgiving, to render homage to the Almighty, as the universal Benefactor: and there were others of atonement and impetration, to pacify his wrath and solicit his favours. Now, as the sacrifice of the altar comprises the highest honours the creature can pay to God; so likewise does it include the greatest blessings to be received from him: first, because it is a sacrifice of atonement, whereby to appease the Deity and satisfy his justice; and secondly, because it is a sacrifice of impetration, to excite his benevolence and draw from him what we want.

I say then, first, that the Mass is a sacrifice of atonement; or, if more intelligible in other words, a sacrifice offered up for the remission of sin. Not that it effects our justification of itself, like baptism and penance: but that the Almighty, pacified by such a meritorious oblation, grants us the desire and gift of repentance.

Insomuch

Infomuch that, to recover the rights forfeited by sin, we need but assist at this sacrifice with suitable dispositions ; and we shall certainly find access to the throne of indulgence. And the reason is obvious : because, when Christ left us this victim, as a source of grace, his intention was that it should be a grace of sanctity and salvation ; a grace, applied through the merits of his own blood, spilled on mount Calvary and shed upon our altars ; a grace, backed with that fervent petition, which he himself joins to his wish to see it fructify ; in fine, a grace, which, thus founded on the mediation of Christ, must necessarily, if I may say so, be productive of its effect.

Shall we then deny that the sacrifice of the Mass disarms the divine Justice ? Alas ! I see this injured God, provoked by our crimes, ready to discharge his avenging thunder on our heads ; but, at that instant, I behold him checked and obliged to drop his hand. At the sight of this sacrifice, I hear him say ; the sinner has roused my indignation, but in what part shall I wound him ? To shield himself from my fury, he opposes a victim, I cannot strike ; he is covered with a blood I am obligated to respect.

Here recollect, my friends, those moments of fervour, in which, impressed with the awful view of a dying God, you have been, as it were, transported in spirit to mount Calvary. How did you then envy the happiness of those faithful souls, that kind heaven made witnesses to its reconciliation with the earth ! Had we, said you, been present at that affecting and wondrous scene, we would have drawn near ; we would have caught that precious blood, which was then spilled ; we would have washed ourselves with it ; and, thus cleansed from our iniquities, we should have been under no apprehensions in regard to our future state. Ah ! my dear people, follow the gentle impulse of these tender emotions : realize these pious transports, whenever you perceive them : assist at the sacred mysteries with all possible respect, and endeavour to participate in the treasures of your redemption.

But the Mass is not only a sacrifice of propitiation, to make atonement for our sins ; it is a victim of impetration likewise, to procure us all sorts of blessings, both spiritual and temporal.

Whatever petitions the Church addresses to the Deity, she makes them through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. For which purpose, she concludes all her prayers with these words ; *through our Lord Jesus Christ, thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, world without end.* Now, in what way can she apply the merits of her Spouse more successfully and efficaciously, than in the sacrifice of the altar ? *In the days of his flesh,* says St. Paul, *he was heard for his reverence,* Heb. v. 7. But is his Divinity at present less deserving of attention ? And, when he solicits for us in person, both as our priest and our victim, is there any thing we may not hope for ; especially if, in the
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first place, we seek the concerns of heaven, our salvation, and his glory? For it is principally with an eye to these the Church offers up this sacrifice; which she never presents without praying that the faithful, and particularly them that assist, may be preserved from eternal misery, and associated with the elect. But as these petitions are general; and, according to the difference of circumstances, we sometimes want one grace, and sometimes another; in the course of the sacrifice, there is a variety of prayers, some to ask for this virtue, and others for that, as necessity may dictate. What a scope for our reflections at those important and precious moments, when the Son of God, in person, is offering himself for us! How favourable an opportunity for each one to lay open to him the grievances of his soul! Let us resolve therefore to take advantage of it, and make use of the time in which we may claim his assistance with such a prospect of success.

But temporary blessings also may have a share in our petitions. Under the Mosaic law, there were peace-offerings, the design of which was either to return thanks for favours received, or to move the divine mercy to a further grant of the like; which, at the time of that carnal institute, were little else but worldly benefits. David, by sacrifice, averted the scourge of pestilence that desolated his kingdom. By the like means Onias obtained the recovery of Heliodorus. Wherefore, says St. Chrysostom, as the sacrifice of the Mass unites in itself all the qualities of those of the old law, it cannot be doubted but the Almighty receives it willingly; even when offered up for temporal things, if they do not interfere with the intentions of his providence.

Nor imagine it to be treating the sacred mysteries disrespectfully, to apply the merits of Christ to the purposes of life. The custom of the Church fully authorizes the fact. In which regard, the paternal condescension of our God is beyond the power of language. But, alas! my friends, was I not apprehensive of abusing your indulgence, what reproaches might I not make for your behaviour in this respect? When involved in difficulties, from whom do you seek relief? Among the measures you take to free yourselves, is the sacrifice of the altar your first resource, as it ought to be? Learn at least now however, to set a higher value on the treasure Christ has left you in this inestimable gift. For whether you consider the intrinsic excellence it possesses; or whether you regard the great advantages attending it; there is nothing, let me tell you, more deserving of your notice in the whole system of religion.

I shall conclude, therefore, by entreating you to pay it that attention which its importance demands. Assist at it when you can; and endeavour at those times to enter into such sentiments, as if you were actually witnesses to the crucifixion of your Saviour. When your avocations, or other causes will not allow of your attendance, be present at it in mind at least. For, even when you are working, &c. you may suppose yourselves in the house of God; and

and do nearly the same, as you would, if really there. You may implore the pardon of your sins; may make the oblation with the Priest, and unite yourselves with him. In like manner, you may communicate in spirit, and receive the benediction. In short, if your faith and zeal be equal only to the advantages here proffered, you may reap as much benefit almost from the practice I recommend, as if present at the sacrifice, and thus procure the grace which is to bring you to immortal happiness. Amen.

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DISCOURSE XX.

The Feast of Sts. PETER and PAUL.

On the APOSTLES.

Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men. Matt. iv. 19.

IN consequence of this single sentence, the face of the universe is altered. The whole world becomes a prey to the labours of twelve poor fishermen. "O holy Apostles! exclaims St. Chrysostom, in proportion as your success astonishes, your reward and glory charm me. Your very name implies every elogy, the tongue of man can bestow upon you. You are the pillars of the Church, and the supporters of its faith. For on your basis are we placed to raise the superstructure, of which Christ is the corner-stone."

With how respectful a devotion then ought we not to celebrate their remembrance, and dwell upon their merits? For these reasons, brethren, I shall make use of the present festival, which is sacred to the memory of their leaders, Sts. Peter and Paul, to lay before you a few reflections on the Apostles in general; that you may know in what light to consider them, in regard to yourselves. For, to what purpose to keep their feasts, if we be unacquainted with the relation and respect they bear to us? Wherefore, I affirm that the Son of God has appointed them to administer both as our teachers and our judges; and this double capacity is the ground of the esteem

esteem we owe them, and of that attention, with which we ought to study their lives and doctrine. These two points therefore I will here endeavour to evince ; first, that to the Apostles we are indebted for our faith ; and secondly, that to the Apostles also we shall be responsible for the same. Divine Jesus ; instructor of the ignorant ! who, in the persons of thy disciples, hast displayed thy almighty power, exhibit it again in us through the information of thy dictates ; a blessing, we will here beg of thee, as becomes our inability.

When we are told that we owe our faith to the ministry of the Apostles, with how much unconcern and tepidity do we hear it, Christians ? It is a proposition we acknowledge, without thinking it sufficiently interesting to engage our further attention. Unhappy indifference ! which can have no other foundation than our coldness for religion itself. For, did we truly value our faith, how unbounded a gratitude should we not bear to its original founders !

To this ministry so important, although so laborious at the same time, the Apostles were elected and called by Jesus Christ. A ministry too exalted for any one to trust himself into. "Ye pillars of the Church, says St. Cyril, the hand of God alone could place and settle you." For their light, continues this Doctor, was not like that of Moses, to be confined to Dan Bersabee ; but every corner of the earth was destined to feel the influence of these novel constellations. Filled with the Holy Ghost, they became, as it were, the centre, emitting every ray, that enlightens the human race. For such, my friends, is the purport of that sentence of their divine Master ; *go and teach all nations : as the Father hath sent me, so I also send you.* John xx. 21. This ministry they accepted of and completed in its fullest latitude. For, their mission once confirmed by the descent of the sacred Spirit, I see them, says St. Chrysostom, assembled and convened ; twelve only in number, with Peter at their head ; Peter, I say, the life, the soul of all their enterprizes. What is the subject of their busy consultation ? The conversion of the world : twelve men on one side, and the whole universe on the other. And what is the result of it ? That each man shall undertake the conquest of many empires. No wonder the astonished synagogue should deem them the objects of its censures.

Already however these evangelical champions have entered on their career. Only the extremities of the globe can fix limits to their progress. These once attained, they retrace their former steps ; and, having at first taken different routes, they are amazed at again meeting in almost the middle of their course. Judea and Syria are not enough for the activity of Peter. Paul, after traversing the wide extent of the Grecian States, rejoins him at Rome. Neither the prisons of Herod, nor the irons of Felix can damp the glowing ardour of that zeal, which transports them. *How beautiful, exclaims the Apostle, are the feet of them, that preach the Gospel !* Rom. x. 15.

May they not be thought the Angels the prophet Ezechiel saw standing before God's throne? Ought not their swiftness, which neither fatigue can obstruct, nor obstacles retard, to convince us, that in fact, their feet, as he says, are winged; to cross the seas, to fly from pole to pole; that no people might be deprived, unless by their own fault, of the salvation they are deputed to proclaim to a lost world?

And shall we, my friends, think that such great and arduous labours, undertaken from views of the most disinterested charity, do not entitle them to our esteem? Shall we imagine the glorious privileges with which the Almighty honoured their ministry, can invalidate, or diminish the obligations of our gratitude? It is true that he made them all so many living and perpetual prodigies. But can we suppose, that we owe nothing to the instruments he was pleased to choose? Can weak man do too much for those whom God himself has deigned to glorify? Reflect on the various difficulties they had to struggle and encounter with. Persecuted by the Jews, detested by the Gentiles, they find the whole earth combined against their efforts. They see the Sovereigns of the world bent on exterminating them; the more enlightened turning on them the force of their specious eloquence; all united to destroy them; all forming against them the most sanguinary projects.

Reflect again on the motives that emboldened them to face such dangers. Ask St. John, while immersed in his caldron of boiling oil; St. Bartholomew, under those that are slaying him alive; St. James, exposed defenceless to the sword of Agrippa; ask any of them what leads them to suffer so courageously; it is for you, brethren, will they all answer, with St. Paul in his irons; it is to prove and bear testimony to the gospel we announce; it is to secure to the *elect*, the inheritance purchased for them.

Finally, reflect, dear people, on the efficacy of their mediation at the Almighty throne of mercy. If Christ be the head of the Church, the Apostles are its fathers. If Christ be its sovereign, they are its princes. Since therefore Christ, as the head and monarch of the Church, is, according to St. Paul, its High-priest and Mediator; the Apostles also, of course, whom he has associated to his priesthood, have a right of mediation through the influence of his merits.

A right of mediation, I say, which their zeal and high desert will ever render efficacious. Can he, who made them, while on earth, his intimates and friends, the confidants of his secrets, and the dispensers of his mysteries, can he reject their petitions in the kingdom of his glory? The shadow of Peter heretofore effected different cures: and shall Peter, now in happiness, have less power than he had then? Or shall St. Paul, who formerly wished to be anathematized for his brethren, have less affection for them at present? For the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord bore so long with the ungrateful and stubborn Israelites: and, if he re-
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members us alas ! let us own that we are indebted for it to the intercession of the Apostles.

And let us ever, Christians, acknowledge the obligations, we have to them. Let us read their lives ; let us praise their virtues ; let us meditate on their conduct ; and, above all, let us attend to their lessons, and imitate their comportment. Such were the endeavours of the primitive believers ; and such also must be ours, if we would be safe at their awful bar, at which we must appear to give an account of that faith, which they have earned for us by their blood.

For hither we must all be cited, brethren. *You, who have followed me*, says Christ, *when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of his Majesty, shall also sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* Matt. xix. 28. Formerly, their power was a power of mildness and persuasion. Not so then however. At that alarming period, it will be a power of force and compulsion. Do you desire, says St. Chrysostom, to see the badges of their authority ? The magistrates of this world are distinguished by their marks ; by the mace which is carried before them ; by the herald that precedes them ; and by the officers who attend them, to enforce their decrees. But what is all this pomp in comparison to the sight that then shall be exhibited to the assembled and wondering universe ? The ensign of authority to be displayed before their judgment seat, is what St. Paul terms *the sword of the spirit* ; a sword, that shall divide the reprobate from the elect. The executioners of their mandates are the angels on the one side, and the devils on the other. The harbinger, to announce their coming, the piercing sound of that shrill trumpet, whose clangor shall be re-echoed to the four corners of the earth. The opening of their commission, the general anarchy of nature. Alas ! goes on St. Chrysostom, if heretofore the multitude were struck with dread at those prodigies of terror, to which they sometimes had recourse to evince their authority, how shall we bear their presence, when they shall come to try us by the rule of the most rigorous severity ?

This rule is no other, my friends, than that of their own faith, which as they were sent to instruct us in, so are we obliged to follow it. The disciple can only be judged by the doctrine of his master. Their doctrine has received the sanction of the Son of God, and by him been acknowledged for the true and genuine creed. The only point in question then will be, how far our faith is conformable to theirs.

Now, their faith was ever one : and this they continually inculcated ; in appearance, dreading none so much as the least variation in matters of doctrine. What St. James teaches at Jerusalem is likewise taught by St. John at Ephesus. St. Thomas in Ethiopia, declares the same as St. Paul at Rome. And, if the latter, as he tells us of himself, suspends his further progress, to return to Jerusalem to consult the other Apostles, it is in order, he says, to pre-serve

serve an uniformity in faith. Is our faith such, my brethren, who, with the exception of some few articles, which we deem to be essential, consider, or at least seem to consider, the rest as indifferent to be believed or not.

Secondly, their faith was simple. Undoubtedly, they had been witnesses to many of our mysteries. The greatest part of them they had learned from the mouth of Christ himself, who had revealed them in the most clear and intelligible terms; and the Holy Ghost had effected that conviction on their minds, which of course must put a bar to hesitation and doubt. Nevertheless, does not St. Peter style the path of faith an obscure path? Is not St. Paul himself daunted at the sight of the immense abyss, when he attempts to sound the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God? Who then are you, Christians, that wish to dive further into the divine secrets than St. Paul did? You, who make a difficulty to admit any thing that exceeds the narrow limits of your comprehension? Who acknowledge no infallible authority, but that of a feeble and presumptuous reason?

Thirdly, their faith was active. Impressed with an exalted idea of the trust committed to them, they were eagerly solicitous to manifest it by their works: attentive not only not to disgrace, but to do honour by their demeanor to the doctrine they announced. Hence that disengagement from the world; that abhorrence of every artifice; that patience, proof to trials; that constancy, by which, forgetful as it were, of the past, and of the great things they had done already, they strove daily to advance further the cause of their heavenly Master. And can you, dear people, whose conduct is a shame to what you profess; who, joining corrupted morals with a most holy and pure belief, so often bring both our Creed and Morality under suspicion; can you think your faith like theirs?

Fourthly, their faith, although invincible as death, was anxious to a nicety both for themselves and for their flocks. For this reason they so frequently reminded the faithful of what they had taught them, and called on them to attest the purity of their doctrine; apprehending above all things any change or innovation. Nothing more affectionate, nor at the same time more discreet, than what such of them as have left us any writings inculcate on this head. Their whole ambition, their whole glory is to leave behind them a sound doctrine, unadulterated as they received it. Is our faith such?

Finally, my friends, be these circumstances as they may, what account shall we be able to render of it at the tribunal of the Apostles? Methinks I see that zeal now kindling in their hearts, which formerly burst out with such violence against the Samaritans. *Wilt thou we command fire to come from heaven, to consume them?* Luke ix. 54. Alas! Christians, the season of mercy will then be over. Heretofore this God, who, at that time, was come to save, and not to destroy the race of man, disapproved of these their sentiments.

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He replied therefore, that the spirit by which they were actuated in this case, was not the spirit of his gospel, nor becoming them at present. They entered into his views, and reformed their way of thinking on the model of his principles; afterwards giving, as history tells us, the last remnant of their blood for the conversion of the world. But this great, this high price can never be paid in vain, dear people. It will certainly hereafter be redemanded at our hands. If we bring not to their seat of judicature, a faith similar to that they left us, we shall surely be responsible for the corruption of this best of gifts. Incredulous Jerusalem! Ye guilty offspring of parents who murdered those that were sent to them! on your heads will the blood fall that has been spilled so sacrilegiously. Yes, on you, Christians, the blood of those apostolic and holy men, to whose labours and exertions you stand indebted for your faith. On you, I say, this blood, unless you adhere invariably to their principles. On you, in short this blood, if your faith does not tally with theirs; i. e. if it be not that pure, that simple, that docile faith, handed to you by the operation of their ministry.

They themselves will then demand and petition for satisfaction; while Christ, far from checking or repressing their just zeal, will unite with them in wrath, and favour the urgent cries of their long insulted blood. *Wilt thou we command fire to come from heaven to consume them?* I will, he replies; and already the avenging flames descend in rolling torrents, and sweep the herd of infidels into the abyss of endless woe.

Is not this, in effect, the purport of that menace of St. Paul? *To whom, he says, did he swear that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were incredulous?* Heb. iii. 18. A menace, my friends, I repeat, which is addressed to us, as Christians, no less than to the Hebrews. For, to go on with the Apostle's words, *to us also it hath been declared. If to-day you hear his voice then, harden not your hearts.* Heb. ii. 7. Trust not to that appearance of faith you still endeavour to keep up. For in like manner it befell the Israelites. They confided in promises so repeatedly made to them: they grounded their expectancies on a pretended belief of the coming of the Messiah. But their expectancies were frustrated, because their faith was defective.

Let us profit by their errors, and begin on this very day to examine our faith by the rules here prescribed us. The Apostles are destined to be its arbiters and judges. Can we say with a safe conscience we think they will approve of it? Our indispensable duty is a respectful submission. For *the word of God, says St. Paul again, is living and effectual.* Heb. iv. 2. He never speaks in vain. When he threatens, he wills that we hear him; when he dictates, that we submit to him. But this submission must be entire. Any single word, we shall have refused our assent to, will be *a two-edged sword*, scattering confusion and death, and *reaching even to the division of the soul and of the spirit.* Our submission must be sincere. To confess
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with the lips is little, unless the mind and heart keep pace with the professions of the tongue : for there is nothing either so secret in our thoughts, or so confused in our intentions, but the word of God will unravel it and trace it to its very source : it is *the discernor of the thoughts and the intentions of the heart*. Finally, our submission must be simple. No pretences, no excuses to palliate incredulity : because there is no pretence possible the word of God will not do away ; no imaginable excuse it will admit of as sufficient : every thing must be there unveiled ; for *all things are naked and open to his eyes*.

Nevertheless, let us have confidence, continues the Apostle, since we have in heaven, for our High Priest, the very Author of our faith. And more I add, my brethren : since we hold this faith of those to whom he himself was pleased to deliver it : since they, from whom we have it, are still its guardians and protectors : since it is to them we must render the account of it, which will hereafter be demanded of us. Let us be careful only to adhere to it in word and in work ; in our confession and our practice : and then we may appear boldly, and with assurance at their tribunal, secure of finding mercy and happiness everlasting. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XXI.

On the Feast of the ASSUMPTION.

Who is this that cometh up from the desert flowing with delights? Cantic. viii. 5.

IT is natural for us to be surpris'd at seeing a mere creature find comfort and delight amidst the horrors of dissolution; forsake and resume its body at almost the same instant; but resume it triumphant, and crowned with immortality. Again, it is natural for us to ask who this favourite creature is that the Almighty is pleas'd to distinguish in so glorious a manner. *Who is this? Leaning on her beloved, she cometh up from the desert.* Born on the wings of the air, she pierces through the clouds. The vault of heaven rings with the joyful plaudits of the angels. Jesus Christ himself receives and places her, in rank, above all the celestial spirits. By these marks of honour, brethren, do we not know who it is that here triumphs? It is the Queen of the heavenly court; it is the daughter of the Most High; it is the Spouse of the Holy Ghost; it is the Mother of our Redeemer; it is Mary, in short, herself. Yes, Christians, we might have room for wonder, was her triumph less magnificent. Could so powerful a Son as Jesus, do less to shew his esteem for so pious a mother as Mary? But what then is it engages him to honour her so conspicuously? What is the true cause of this her glorious elevation? It is her humility and debasement, as I here propose to shew you. Lend me your attention therefore, and let us try

try to discover, first, what was the source of her unexampled humility ; and secondly, what the cause of her enviable happiness. She is humble, because she is a creature ; she is exalted, because her Son has adorned her with every grace. Wherefore, all that I have to say, dear people, on the assumption of the holy Mary, I shall reduce to two short reflections. First, to what a pitch did Mary humble herself ? Secondly, to what a height has Christ exalted her ? Divine Jesus ! who on this day wert pleased to crown thy sacred mother, bestow thy blessing on us likewise, as we here implore thee through her means.

Mary knew herself ; she was submissive to the orders of heaven ; she referred every thing to God. These were the solid foundations on which her humility was built. It must be wholly our own fault, if we draw not from this first part such reflections as may tend to abate our pride, and give a check to our groundless vanity.

I say then, first, that Mary knew herself, and was conscious of what she was, my friends. And what, I ask, did she see in herself ? her unworthiness and want of merit. To be satisfied of this, we need but peruse that canticle which her lively sense of gratitude has so beautifully penned. You call me, she says to her cousin, Elizabeth, the mother of the Deity : it is true that I am ; and my joy-transported soul gives the glory of it to him to whom it wholly appertains ; not to myself, nor any creature ; but to the Almighty, who has thus vouchsafed to honour and distinguish me ; *my soul doth magnify the Lord.* Luke i. 46. You tell me, that at the sound of my voice you felt the infant with which you are pregnant, jump with joy on my account : but *my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour*, who has deigned to become incarnate of me. You are blessed, because you believe : but *future generations shall call me blessed, because the Lord hath regarded the humility of his handmaid.* What sentiments, my brethren ! How does this holy Virgin, forgetful of herself, and annihilated in her own eyes, turn all her thoughts to heaven ?

Alas ! Christians, how far are we from having the merits of Mary ! Notwithstanding which, so far from the humble thoughts she cherishes so feelingly, are we not puffed up with the most extravagant self-conceit ? So far from trying to know, do we not endeavour to forget ourselves ? This sacred Virgin sees nothing in what belongs to her but subjects of humiliation ; we see nothing but perfections, which often have no other grounds than the delusions of our fancy, and with which we are frequently as much elated, as if we were really in possession of them. Let us learn our instruction from Mary. Let us strive to be humble as she was : and for this purpose, let us study, and acknowledge our unworthiness.

The certain way to acquire a true and solid humility is to know ourselves thoroughly. We are blind : we are poor : we are sinners. What urgent motives to humble ourselves ! First, I say we are blind ; and hence our obligation of entreating God continually to enlighten our mental darkness : for this is our only fund ; this alone
belongs

belongs to us. Secondly, I say we are poor; and, in truth, such is our necessitous state, that we have nothing we can call our own; of this David was convinced, when he said, *bow down thine ear, O Lord! and hear me; for I am needy and poor.* Ps. lxxxv. 1. Thirdly, in fine, the character, we bear, of sinners is of all motives the most proper to make us sensible of our baseness; as there is nothing so degrading as the imputation of this guilt. This, nevertheless, dear people, is the inheritance entailed upon us by the crime of our first-parent: we are born in sin, and all of us have naturally a strong propension to it. These motives should be sufficient, surely, to inspire us with a sincere humility, and to afford us much better reasons, than they did to the pious Mary, to adore the mercy of God, who compassionates our wretchedness.

In the next place, the submission of this Virgin is no less observable. *Behold the hand-maid of the Lord, she says, be it done unto me according to thy word* Luke i. 38. She does not comprehend how the prophecy is to be accomplished; *how shall this be done?* Nevertheless, she submits her understanding, as soon as she becomes sensible the Angel speaks in the name of heaven: a silent obedience is the part she thinks most adapted to her circumstances. And, in fact, had she been less submissive, what a crowd of impertinent reasonings might have obtruded on her mind? How justly might she have replied: are the tokens, which you give me, the credentials of a King? does an obscure birth accord with him, who comes to redeem the human race? Her eyes behold nothing: but her faith admits the whole. She adores what she cannot fathom. The Almighty speaks: an humble soul requires no more. What a lesson, Christians, for us, to learn submission from her example? But in what does this submission consist? First, in shewing ourselves obedient under the influence of such circumstances, as it shall please the Lord to place us in. Secondly, in being religiously subjected to the powers, his almighty hand has put over us.

First then, we must render to the Sovereign Being that worship of submission, (for it may be properly so called) which, in writing to the Philippians, St. Paul recommends to this purpose; I know how to live poorly, and how to live in abundance; having experienced each of these things, I have learned to bear with them both; with good living and with hunger, with plenty and with indigence. Let such be our sentiments. We are sinners, let us say; and, in this quality, can challenge nothing. Whatever God gives us, it is the effect of his liberality. When he withdraws his bounty from us, what have we to complain of? or what cause to arraign his decrees, which are directed by the strictest justice?

Nor is it less equitable to submit to those, to whom he has given authority over us; for from him is all power derived. To resist the command of superiors then is to resist the will of heaven: and they, that thus oppose it, will draw down its weighty curse. You children! disobey your parents, who require what is just only; in
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so doing, you disobey God. You servants! grumble at the orders of your master, who desires nothing more than what he may rightfully expect of you; in so doing you revolt against the ordinances of God. For whether the Lord speaks through the medium of his word, or whether he explains himself by the ministry of superiors, it is still the same power that orders and commands! and it is equally to oppose the Sovereign of the universe.

And what evinces yet further that Mary always built on the foundation of humility, is that, reflecting on herself and considering what she was, she was careful to ascribe and refer every thing to God. *My soul, she says, doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.* She commends not herself, but she gives glory to the Deity: she rejoices not in herself, but in the Lord, her salvation. And what is it convinces her that God is the sole author, the origin of all her good? It is the just sense, she entertains, of her condition and unworthiness; *because the Lord hath regarded the humility of his hand-maid.* This is a maxim, Christians, you should never forget. Every thing comes from God, *What hast thou,* says the Apostle, *that thou hast not received?* You have abilities; you have health; your lands are fertile; your business thrives. But is not all this the gift of the gracious hand of heaven? *What hast thou, thou hast not received* again? Mary then became humble by considering her situation; and the more she humbled herself, the more was she exalted. Let us now see in brief to what a height Jesus Christ has raised her.

Without entering on a discussion respecting Mary's assumption; let us examine rather in what her elevation consists. She obeys the maxims of Christ: she is filled with the grace of Christ: she is crowned by the hand of Christ.

The first source, I say then, of Mary's exaltation was her attention to adhere to the maxims of her Son. Now, the only way to become acquainted with the maxims of Jesus Christ, my brethren, is to meditate on his holy word. Mary, attentive to the words of Christ, made them the subject of her most serious and deep consideration. Of this the scriptures inform us, when they say she treasured up every thing that fell from his sacred mouth. But what does his word tell us? That poverty and sufferings are the foundations of a Christian life. For this reason, he was pleased that his holy Mother should be poor. For this reason, he would have her merits to be perfected by sufferings.

Mary was poor. But the poverty that made her so acceptable to God, was a poverty of spirit and a cheerful resignation. She was poor; and, at the same time, she was so satisfied with her indigent condition, that she had not a wish that matters should be otherwise. For be not here imposed upon by deceitful appearances. All are not poor that are in want of the things of life. The number of the poor, my friends, I allow is very great; and this particularly among ourselves, taking the body of us in general. But how few, alas! can

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we truly say are poor? i. e. How few are so disposed, as to be content with their condition? How few, that can say sincerely with the High-Priest Heli, *it is the will of the Lord; let him do what is good in his sight*; 1 Kings, iii. 18. I submit to it with deference; since it will be the occasion of my becoming more conformable to him.

But Mary not only felt the distressful gripe of poverty; she was also exposed to the corroding pain of sufferings. No; Jesus Christ was not sparing to her of those things, that were to be the source of her happiness and glory. Mary suffered much; and, to comprehend the extent of her sufferings, you need but call to mind, dear Christians, those of her beloved Son. Every blow, that he endured in his adorable body, wounded the heart of this most tender of mothers. She suffered therefore; but she found her comfort and joy in the afflictions, that were laid upon her. And as it was necessary Christ himself should suffer, to enter into his glory; so likewise it was necessary that Mary should resemble him, to be raised to the degree of eminence, she possesses in his kingdom. She, my friends, is our model: how far do we copy her? You suffer, I am conscious: but in what dispositions? Is it not too often with fretfulness and impatience? Do you not, in general, lose the fruit of your afflictions? Learn to suffer like Mary, if you are willing, like her, to follow the maxims taught by Christ.

In the second place I said, brethren, that Mary was replenished with the grace of the Lord. *Hail, full of grace*, says the Angel on addressing her. Not only is she in a state of grace then, but she is filled with this divine effluence. Happy plenitude, that renders her the favourite of heaven! The ambition of mankind leads them to aspire to worldly honours; how erroneous an emulation! Mary is full of grace: this alone is true glory. If it be not granted to us, dear people, to attain to that fulness of grace, by which Mary was distinguished; at least let it be our study to improve the precious portion of it, that was infused into us at baptism. Or, if we have been so unhappy as to forfeit it by our sins, let us endeavour to recover it by a salutary repentance.

Mary is full of grace; and of this we are assured by the testimony of an Angel. *The Lord is with her*. Alas! Can we, my friends, console ourselves with the same happy conviction? We, who have so frequently obliged him to abandon us? For what is it we do, when we indulge ourselves in sin without restraint or control? We imitate the wretches mentioned by St. Luke, who, in the frenzy of their passion, exclaimed, *we will not have this man to reign over us*. Luke xix. 14. We shew, by offending him, that we are unwilling to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Deity. But, in spite of us, he will exert it. And whereas, were we but faithful to his commands, we should find him to be a king most gracious and bountiful; we shall experience, if we displease him, that he is a monarch most severe and tremendous in his punishments.

Mary,

Mary, diligent in complying with the maxims of her Son ; Mary, full of grace and the unction of the Divinity, is at length crowned by Christ, and seated on her throne.

To form, says St. Bernard, a proper judgment of Mary's glory, we should reflect that the same Virgin, who received the Son of God, on the day of his incarnation, is received by him, in her turn, in the mystery we now celebrate. Mary is happy, continues this Father, in receiving Jesus Christ ; but she is still more so, when she is received by him into the palace of his glory. Nor is it any thing more than just, he adds, that Christ should give his mother the most eminent seat in heaven ; since she afforded him, with alacrity, the most honourable abode on earth. Infomuch that, as the Eternal Father placed his Son on his right hand, at his ascension ; so did the Son of God place his mother on his right hand, at her assumption. And as it was an honour to our Saviour's humanity to be seated next to his Father ; so was it a privilege most glorious to Mary to be seated next to her Son. What further shall I add, dear people ? But say still with St. Bernard ; how-much-soever I desire to speak of the glory of the blessed Mary, the lustre of her refulgent throne overpowers my feeble organs, so that I condemn myself to silence ; and, content with admiring the honours that are heaped upon her, I rest satisfied with thanking God, for having raised her above all the tongue of man can say about her.

Sacred virgin ! Heaven is now thy portion ; but the earth is not deprived of thy good wishes and benevolence. In the zenith of thy happiness, thou wilt still be mindful of us : nor wilt thou disdain from thy seat of glory to cast an eye on this land of misery, in which we sojourn in our state of banishment. Thou wilt own us for thy children ; thou wilt receive our respects ; thou wilt forward our petitions ; and the nearer thou approachest to the source of all grace, the more plentiful supply thou wilt procure us in our wants. *Refuge of sinners !* implore for us the gift of a true and sincere conversion. *Comforter of the afflicted !* extend thy pity to all that are in want of thy assistance. *Help of Christians !* lend thy gracious aid to the professors of this name, that, fulfilling their obligations, and living up to their character, they may be brought to eternal felicity, through the merits of thy Son. Amen.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XXII.

The FEAST of ALL SAINTS.

Know that the Lord hath made his holy one wonderful. Ps. iv. 4.

IF we will but read attentively the lives of the Saints, my friends, we shall acknowledge, without hesitation, the truth of this sentence: we shall own that this text is well adapted to those *holy ones*, to the celebration of whose common festival the Church invites us on this day. The mercy of the Deity made them *wonderful* on earth; by the effusion of those graces, that distinguished them among men: and *wonderful* in heaven; where their merits have exalted them to such an eminent degree of happiness. The deserts of the Saints are far above the reach of our shallow comprehension. All that we can do is to look on with admiration; and, while we render them the tribute of deference and respect, to avail ourselves of their mediation for the amendment of our lives. It was their love of thee, O divine Redeemer! that principally contributed to their sanctity and holiness: it was their devotion to thy sacred humanity, and their attention to copy the pattern, which thou thyself wert pleased to give them, both during thy life and at thy death. The illustrious endowments, that adorned their souls, were the fruit of thy example, the emanation of thy plenitude, the produce of thy seed, the effect of thy benediction.

benediction. It is from this same fountain of living waters, this source of every good, that I must here draw the grace to expatiate on their merits. Open it therefore to me, and enable me, by its influence, to treat of their deserts, for the edification of thy faithful and the extension of thy kingdom.

The Saints in paradise, whose feast we are to-day called upon to solemnize on earth, are in the actual and full enjoyment of the completion of their wishes: in the enjoyment, I say, of favours, that we, in our mortal flesh, can only possess in hope. In the happy mansions, which they inhabit, one affection, one desire, one occupation employs them all. So close a connection, so perfect a friendship, so mutual a love invites them, that each of them receives as great a pleasure from the bliss of his neighbour, as he does from his own. With them, all enjoy through sympathy and the complacency of benevolence. Not so the Church militant. For, although the bond of charity connects its various members; still there must be a difference of conditions and degrees, of callings and graces, of sentiments and inclinations. In their state of blessedness is the fulness of all good, ineffable delight, and consummate felicity. What a happiness to be ever in the company of so many millions of exulting spirits; to hear their enchanting harmony; and, with them, to partake of every rapture, that heaven itself can afford! What an inconceivable felicity to see God, face to face, his infinite charms unveiled! to enjoy, to possess, to be completely absorbed in him, who is our beginning and last end, our universal and sovereign good, and whose deficiency or absence nothing can compensate! and this, to crown the whole, I add, for an endless eternity, without mixture or alloy, without check or diminution! Whereas, brethren, in this vale of tears, in these regions of mournful exile, there is nothing to be met with but anxiety and solicitude, but sickness and affliction, but misery and wretchedness.

However, notwithstanding the immense difference between the state of the blessed in heaven, and that of Christians here on earth, it is still the same Church, the same city, the same family. *We are fellow citizens*, says St. Paul, *with the Saints and domestics of God*. Eph. ii. 19. Of course, there is an intelligence, a communication between the Saints of the Church triumphant, and Christians of the Church militant; in like manner as there is a constant intercourse between the inhabitants of the same city, children of the same family, and members of the same body; for we are *one body* in Christ Jesus. And this we are daily taught to acknowledge in our creed. *I believe the communion of Saints*, we say. Wherefore, as the Saints protect us, they are entitled to our respect; and, as they pray for and assist us, it behoves us to honour them, and invoke their intercession.

There are many reasons, that make it incumbent on us to solicit the prayers of the Saints. I will confine myself to a few, not to trespass

trespass on your patience: and the first of them, that I propose, brethren, I allege on the part of God. In this regard, I say, it becomes our duty to implore their mediation, from the spirit of a christian humility. Christ proclaims, *come to me, all ye that labour, and I will refresh you*; Matt. ii. 28. And the Holy Ghost tells us that the prayer of him, who humbles himself, is pleasing to the ear of God, and shall be graciously received. Wherefore, if any one shall say in his heart; my Saviour indeed invites me; but I have not sufficient assurance to address myself to him personally: covered, as I am, with sores and with the ulcers of my crimes, I am unworthy to present myself to the view of his infinite sanctity; but I will have recourse to him through his Saints; I will supplicate their aid; I will make use of the powerful interest, which they have at his throne of mercy; such a one, I say, addresses himself to Jesus, although it be through the Saints, he is introduced to his sacred presence; and his petition will be heard, as was that of the devout Centurion, who, applied to Jesus Christ for the restoration of his servant's health through the medium of his friends. Luke vii.

The second thing, that calls upon us to venerate the Saints, is that sense of religion, which we should never lay aside. This virtue obliges us to pay tribute to God's greatness, not only in itself and those perfections, that accompany it; but also in his friends, and whatever is connected with him. The woman, related to have laboured for the space of twelve years under an issue of blood, had conceived so high an opinion of the power of Jesus Christ, that *she said within herself, if I can but touch his garment, I shall be healed of my disorder*. Matt. ix. 21. With this idea, she presses through the crowd; she comes respectfully behind him; she gently takes hold of the hem of his vestment. And no sooner does our compassionate Saviour perceive what she is about, than turning to her, the Evangelist tells us, he rewards her humble confidence, and effects the cure, she sought for; *be of good heart, he says, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole*. If such be the happy consequence of setting a just value on what belongs to the Divinity; which, I ask, do you think bears the nearest relation to him; a robe, that covers his limbs, or the Saints who are the members of his spiritual and mystic body? a defence against the weather, or the temples of the Holy Ghost? a piece of perishable linen, or souls immortal, and reflecting the bright image of his glory?

St. Chrysostom suggests another reason, to shew how equitable it is we should reverence the Saints; viz. the motive of love and charity. When an officer returns home, after some very signal and important service, is it not the part of every good citizen, every well-wisher to his country's interest, to commend him, to praise him, and to join in celebrating his victory with a suitable festivity? that victory, which, while it exalts and illustrates the hero himself, redounds, with a degree of honour, on his King and fellow subjects? All those, in like manner, who are lovers of their true country, heaven, cannot but feel a partiality for the merits

of the Saints. They take a pleasure in reading their lives, in speaking of their virtues, their combats, their triumphs; of what they undertook, what they did, what they suffered for the love of Jesus.

How acceptable to the Almighty is such a conduct in regard to his Saints, we may gather from a part of the history of Mary Magdalen. St. Matthew tells us that, while our Saviour sat publicly at table, this renowned penitent, drawing near to him, took the liberty to pour on his head some precious ointment, she had brought with her. And how does Christ take it? He receives it with so much complacency, as not only to be her advocate against the censures of them, that blamed her; but also to declare to them that, wherever his word was announced, her praise should be recorded for the action she had just done. Now, if Magdalen, by shedding perfumes on the head of her Redeemer, has raised to herself a monument of never-ceasing commendations, shall the Saints have done less by the tears of piety and devotion, which they have so pientifully dropped in the embraces of his cross? by distributing their property among his poor and indigent members? by spilling their blood with so much alacrity for the propagation of his faith? *Amen, I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached, that, which she hath done, shall be told for a memory of her.* Matt. xxvi. 13.

In the book of Ecclesiasticus, the Wise-man extols the Saints, whose virtues adorn the pages of the testament of Moses; and he invites us to join our voices in paying tribute to their memory. *Let us praise, he says, the men, that were renowned in their generations.* Eccclus xlv. 1. But by how much stronger ties are we bound to honour the Saints, exhibited in our own testament, of which the ancient was but a type? The blessed Mary, Virgin-mother of the God of infinite sanctity, and Queen of all the elect? The holy Apostles, the pillars of our religion and the fathers of christianity? The glorious martyrs, who, by their blood, have sealed his faith, and fertilized his inheritance? The numerous body of confessors, whose doctrine and example have at all times shone forth, to guide his faithful through the gloom and obscurity of life? The white-robed train of virgins, whose unspotted innocence shall for ever reflect the candour of the primitive Creator? Such, brethren, are the Saints, whom, as Christians we are bound to respect. Honour should be the reward and recompense of virtue. In them every virtue shines out in its native lustre. Applause therefore and esteem are justly due to their exalted merits. The Lord promised Samuel that he would glorify the persons, who should pay attention to his ministry. And may not those, that honour the Saints, expect a like return?

The Saints are now raised to the highest pinnacle of glory. They are no more likely to be affected by the delusive charms of vanity, than the huge bulk of the Alps, to be overturned by a gust of wind. The honours, we can pay them on earth, are so insignificant, in comparison with those, which they already enjoy in heaven, that they never can elate them. They are the friends
of

of the Almighty, his creatures, his favourites; they are the object of his complacency and the matter of his sacred thoughts. And shall we, dear people, think them undeserving of our notice, or unworthy of our esteem? Is it not our duty to love them, that God loves; and to honour those, he glories in? *To me thy friends O God! are exceedingly honourable*, says the Psalmist; *their principality is strengthened*. Ps. cxxxviii. 17. *Thou shalt make them princes over the earth*. Ps. xlv. 17. And what do they say of themselves in the book of Revelations? *Thou hast made for us a kingdom; and we shall reign on the earth*. Apoc. v. 10. Yes, and still more, happy souls! you shall also reign in heaven. For of you it is said; *theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you, from the foundation of the world*. Matt. xxv. 34. Let us then honour them, my brethren; let us respect, let us reverence them, as so many princes, whom the source of all dominion, God himself, has pleased to delegate to be our governors and judges. If we do so, there can be no doubt but we shall happily experience them to be our advocates and guardians.

St. Augustine marks yet more distinctly our line of conduct towards the Saints, and describes fully the principal motives of that honour, which we owe them. The Christian, he says, celebrates with a religious solemnity the memory of the Saints, with a view to be associated to their merits, to be assisted by their prayers, to be encouraged by their examples. Take care of being disheartened, he continues, and of saying in your mind: I shall not be saved; I do not belong to the Son of God, nor to the society of his children, since I cannot keep the fasts, which my duty requires of me; since I cannot wear hair-cloth, nor live in solitude, like the anchorite. This is much the same thing as if the ear or hand should say: I do not belong to the human body, because I do not see objects, like the eye. It would ill become either of them to speak in such a manner. It is the province of each member to do its best in its respective sphere, and of all of them, in general, to labour for one another; the eye to see for the ear; the hand to work for the eye; and the ear to hear for them both. Rejoice, continues this Doctor, for the graces bestowed on your neighbour: and by his means you shall accomplish what you cannot by your own. Is he endowed with the gift of continency? Love this virtue in him, and it will become yours by participation. Is your constitution stronger than his, and better able to support fatigue? If he esteems you for it, your labours will add to his merit, and be serviceable to him: because he is in you, if not in nature and in essence, at least by affection and the union of charity.

When therefore, my friends, you read of the great things the Saints have done, of the illustrious deeds of virtue, to which their history bears evidence; if you rejoice at the relation of them from a principle of zeal; if you approve, commend, and praise them; no doubt but these dispositions will entitle you to their regard, and will be the means of your obtaining a share in their protection.

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They ought to offord you this assistance : they can do it ; and they will. They *ought*, I say ; because you are their votaries and clients. They *can* ; because, if God hears the prayers of such, as fear him ; how readily will he listen to them, that love him with so much fervour, as the Saints do ? And lastly, they *will* help you ; because those sentiments of compassion, for which they were so remarkable in this life, are neither lost nor diminished : but, on the contrary, are enlarged and refined, since they themselves are now absorpt in the boundless ocean of infinite mercy.

Wherefore, let no one despond, who may have such advocates in heaven. Let no one give way to dejection, when it depends upon himself to have so great an interest at the throne of grace. Rather let their example recommend the pursuit of virtue, which their conduct proclaims to be so easily attainable. Were they not frail, like ourselves ? moulded of the same clay ? composed of flesh and blood ? as susceptible of all impressions, and as delicate as we are ? Had not they the same corrupt and stubborn nature to contend with ? or have not we the same God, and common Saviour, Jesus Christ ? Has not our regeneration in the waters of baptism been similar to theirs ? Are we not children of the same spiritual mother ; nourished with the same gospel ; and fed on the same sacraments ? Are we not candidates for the same happiness ; or are the virtues, that they practised, more heroic than those of Jesus, which they copied so exactly ?

Be ye imitators of me, says one of them, *as I am of Christ*. 1 Cor. iv. 16. Consider well that zeal, brethren, with which, after employing the day in the works of piety, they spent the night in fervent prayer and the glowing breathings of devotion : verifying in themselves, as it were, that saying of the royal Psalmist ; *in the day the Lord hath commanded his mercy, and his canticle in the night*, Pf. xli. 9. - I will not say to you, my friends, *do you in like manner*. Your state of life and the avocations of your business will not possibly allow of it. But, whatever be your condition, I will say to you with the same Prophet ; *evening and morning and at noon I will declare ; and he shall hear my voice*. Pf. liv. 18. In the evening, assemble your families, to adore that beneficent hand, which has led you through the day ; and, by calling yourselves to an account, to rectify whatever errors you may have committed during the course of it. In the morning, prepare for your work, by invoking the spirit of God, for his direction and assistance. At mid-day, offer your hearts to him, with all your labours and employments ; and renew your supplications that he would avert all evils from you, and support you in his service.

If you thus strive to imitate the virtues of the Saints, and to model your lives by the patterns, they have left you, dear people ; they will take you under their patronage, they will help you by their prayers, they will share their merits with you ; and, finally, they will intercede for you that you may be associated to their happy company. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

THE COMMEMORATION

OF

ALL SOULS.

On Praying for the Dead.

It is a holy and wholesome cogitation to pray for the dead.

Macc. ii. xii. 46.

THE practice of the Church of praying for the souls of the faithful, that are departed out of this life, is a practice, that pity alone might be sufficient to recommend to us. For, as we believe that they are to be eased by the prayers offered for them by the living, we must be wholly devoid of feeling not to lend them this assistance. Viewing things in this light, no Catholic will surely fail to make them the subject of his daily thoughts. But, on this annual summons, by which we are called to unite in this work of mercy, and to offer our petitions, in a body, in behalf of these poor souls, the obligation is greatly strengthened. I have already discussed this matter on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. But as I there appealed to your feelings only, without shewing the ground you stood upon, I will here run over the motives, that support our faith on this article.

The belief of a purgatory, i. e. of a place of temporary punishment, where the sins must be atoned for, that shall remain unexpiated at death; this belief, I say, and the custom of praying for the dead, are principles fully established by the authority of the sacred writings.

But

But I must here previously remark, that whatever exceptions may be made against any of the books in particular, that are commonly called *canonical*, I am now speaking to those who admit the whole of them without reserve. To proceed, therefore ;

In the second book of the Maccabees, as cited in my text, we are informed, brethren, that Judas Maccabeus, having vindicated his oppressed country from the tyranny that had so long trampled on it, sent to Jerusalem a sum of money *for sacrifices to be offered for the sins of the dead*, &c. Maccab. 12. But why, unless he thought they were to be relieved by such means ? And that this was not the only private sentiment of Judas, but the universally received opinion of the people of the Jews, is evident from the circumstances. For, as innovations in religious matters were at all times odious to them ; so, in this period in particular, every attempt of the kind must have been superlatively offensive : a period, my friends, in which each individual of them was bleeding in the defence of his religion, and the rights of his forefathers. Wherefore, it can neither be supposed this practice should have crept in then, had it been unusual and novel ; or that it should have been sanctioned by the Spirit of God, if superfluous and vain.

Nor is this the only proof to shew the Jewish nation made offerings for the dead. Their form of prayers, still in being, which they used in their captivity, tends equally to evince it. The Jews, at that time were the chosen people of God, and to them was committed the deposit of his law. Our heavenly Saviour, who came to direct us into the way of his truth, was never backward in reproofing such errors as he observed in their doctrine. Now, it is remarkable, that although he often conversed about the state of the dead, yet he never threw out a hint against the custom of praying for them. Is it unsafe then to conclude that he approved of it as laudable.

But, I say more. The New Testament, as we style it, or the history of this God incarnate, abounds with many passages that establish this belief. I will only instance in one, as sufficient for the present purpose. Christ tells us, by St. Matthew, that *whoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor the world to come*. Matt. xii. 31. Now, what are we to understand by this ? That the sin of which he treats, shall be pardoned in neither place ; and consequently, that in both of them there is forgiveness of sins. This, I say, is the plain and obvious meaning of his words ; unless we suppose he trifles with us ; or, what is worse, misguides our judgment in an article of great importance. But where, I ask, in the next world is this pardon of sin to be looked for ? In heaven ? no ; for nothing defiled can enter there. In hell ? no ; for out of hell there is no redemption. Where then ? but in purgatory, or that middle state of souls, which, without wrangling about a name, this passage shews there must be.

Hence,

Hence, from the beginning of Christianity, it has been usual with the church offer prayers for the faithful departed. And, from the writings of the Fathers, we find it to have been a practice universally adopted.

But we need not go so far, dear people. Reason plainly dictates the existence of a purgatory. For it tells us in the first place, that every sin, however small, is an offence of the Supreme Being, for which his justice must be satisfied; and, of course, that whoever dies in such a state, will be surely punished in consequence. In the second place, it informs us, that there are some sins so light, as not to deserve the fire of hell. As therefore we know, on the one side, that every sin must be atoned for; and, on the other, that mortal sin alone can merit everlasting torments: what must be the lot of those whose venial sins call for punishment; but whose guilt is not so great as to sentence them to eternal misery? Many souls die most certainly defiled with lesser stains: many under some attachment that disqualifies them for the beatific vision: some, whose repentance, although sincere, has not been complete: others, who have discharged in part only the debt owing to their crimes. What must become of all such as die in this condition? Let reason plead their cause, and allow them a middle state; where they may supply whatever is owing to the justice of their God; where their stains may be cleansed; where their defilements may be purified.

Let us consider these suffering souls, my brethren, as the elected heirs to heaven, the prospect of which sustains them under the inflictions of its vengeful arm. Let us look upon them as the object of God's infinite charity; who, although he chastises them in the severity of his justice, recommends them, in his mercy, to that friendly assistance, which we, as their fellow-members, have it in our power to afford them. On this day in particular, on which we commemorate them all in a body, let us manifest our benevolence for them, as he invites us to do, through the merits of his Son.

If a charitable compassion for all that are in misery, be the principal ingredient in the character of a christian, can we think we are not obligated to shew it on this occasion? Oh! my friends, had we but a glimpse of the torments they endure in their imprisonment, how greatly should we pity and lament their condition? How would our eyes stream with tears, and our bowels yearn with tenderness, to see the virtuous servants of God, and our brethren in Christ, suffering such tortures as defy all description! There, perchance, we should find some intimate acquaintance, some well-beloved brother, some affectionate parent. Yes, dear people, this is but too true, perhaps for most of us present. And can we be so dead to compassion, so steeled to humanity, as to refuse them a few prayers?

Or, if we are so unfeeling in their regard, can we be insensible to ourselves at least, and the calls of our own welfare? Think, Christians, how much these souls will be indebted to you. How gratefully will they requite you by their earnest supplications? How strongly

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ly will they plead for you in the day of your necessity? What a help to your salvation will be the interest of such friends? What a comfort to be assured of their good wishes and favour? But, above all, what an advocate with the God of mercy, will be the mercy you shewed them? who, in consideration of your benevolence, will support you in your distress, and reward you with that happiness, which he has promised to the compassionate. Amen.



F I N I S

